SHORT STORIES 1D.

No. 723. Week ending November 8th, 1902.

THE WOMAN WHO CHAPERONED BELINDA

Splendid New Series of Articles Revealing Secrets of Life in High Society

(SEE FIRST PAGE)

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS

BELINDA

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Short Stories.

No. 723. For the Week Ending November 8th, 1902. ONE PENNY.

A FASCINATING NEW SERIES. BEGINS HERE.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

Real life in High Society vividly portrayed.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

A keen sense of honour, we are told, is the watchword of the aristocracy. The forthcoming series of revelations—the actual experiences, remember, of a member of this aristocracy—tell a very different tale. The young girl whom Lady Peggy Carstairs—the pseudonym of the writer of the articles—chaperons, is the victim of as cruel and as crafty a series of plots as can be imagined. The heiress to great wealth, men of title, of old and honourable names, do not scruple to use the basest means to force her into marriage.

Everywhere the girl is a victim of intrigue, and to all her dangers and mischances she can only oppose her love and faith in the man of her choice, a man without title or wealth.

Many and various are the dangers to which she is subjected; her liberty, her very life is threatened. On one occasion her persecutor threatens to mar her beauty if she persists in refusing him.

With her chaperon she visits the Riviera, Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg, Vienna, all the centres of fashionable life. Everywhere attempts are made to trick her into marriage.

The revelations are startling, almost painfully so. They unmask the shams and the frauds practised in daily life in smart society. Above all, they cast a strong and searching light upon its dark places, its family secrets, strange mysteries, its extravagances and vices. All are truthfully and vividly portrayed by Lady Peggy Carstairs.

I Lose a Fortune and Find Belinda.

In the opinion of all young people, youth is the appointed time for romance, delightful happenings—fascinating, unexpected. Not till we come to middle age, say forty-five, which nowadays looks thirty-three, do we realise our mistake. At any rate I realised it, for at that age, and a little later, I met with the strangest and most exciting experiences of my life.

I had lived, as I say, some forty odd years in the world—though you wouldn't have thought it to look at me—the world of fashion that people call "Society." As a young girl, the daughter of the Earl of Darisbrook, I had been a social success. As a young woman, the wife of Sir Evelyn Carstairs, a man of great wealth, I had enjoyed distinction.

Those were pleasant years, the days that followed were far different.

Sir Evelyn died suddenly, leaving me a widow at twenty-eight with three young children. Heart disease ran in his family, so his death was not wholly unexpected. What was unexpected, and severely so, was the fact that he died penniless, all his money having gone in copper mines that held no copper.

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Imagine my position! A widow with a title, but without a penny, and with three girls on her hands.

What was I to do? Bring up my daughters on charity disguised as patronage? Impossible. My pride revolted at the thought. And yet what other course was open to me? How could I earn a living for my children and myself?

My old friend Crawley Drummond solved the difficulty. He told me of an American millionaire, illiterate but ambitious, who wanted his daughter launched into Society. I saw the man and agreed to chaperon his daughter on my own terms. Not only did he pay me to act as chaperon, but agreed to give me a large sum if I procured a titled husband for his daughter.

Within six months she was a duchess. I took my cheque and invested it to great advantage. Next came two sisters, pretty girls, who went off without much trouble. For them also I received a handsome sum. I invested my money under Crawley's advice in a bank of great repute—no mines for me—and with the aid of a little judicious speculation my income crept up to a respectable figure. I had no need to act as chaperon again, I had enough to live in comfort and bring out my girls.

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My life from that time on was that of most mothers in Society. I looked after my daughters, studied their complexions and designed their frocks. Later I found them suitable husbands—they all married well—and I arranged their settlements.

By the time the youngest was off my hands, I felt, having married all my daughters, I had done my duty, and that it was time to—well, to consider myself. And nowhere is it possible to pay oneself more charming consideration than in Cairo.

I had had a very trying time the previous year. Millicent's marriage, tiresome to arrange, had been very difficult to carry out. She was the youngest of my children, and somewhat self-willed. She talked a lot of rubbish about love—true her husband's neither young nor handsome—but then he has £15,000 a year. However, the wedding had come off at last, and now, having need of rest, I decided, as I say, to visit the city of the Caliphs.

A lovely afternoon in January found me on the Piazza of the Continental Hotel—Shepheard's is getting quite too general nowadays—in utter and complete content. Satisfied with myself and all the world.

Cairo is a wonderful place, the luxury, the refinement of the West, side by side with the immemorial customs of the East. The Ezbekiya or modern quarter of the town presents no unusual features. It might as easily be a part of Cannes, or Mentone, as Cairo. Its hotels are sumptuously decorated, their appointments as luxurious as those on the opposite side of the Mediterranean. Its roads are well drained, and lit with electric light, while down the principal thoroughfares run the electric tramcars.

The native quarter, where the Bazaars are to be found, is very different. There the East and the West shake hands. All the peoples of the earth are to be seen down the Mooski, or main street. On either side of the road are native shops or stalls, gay with bright colours, round which a constant bargaining goes on. In the roadway itself passes a never-ending procession of all races and nationalities.

The keen-faced Yankee from the States jostles a solemn and impassive-looking Turk who ambles past on a gaily caparisoned mule. Melancholy-looking fellahs—Egypt's hewers of wood and drawers of water—clad in scanty blue kaftans, mingle with green-turbaned shereefs and picturesque Bedouins, who in flowing bernouses stalk proudly by.

Here, a Moor of venerable aspect, turbaned and sandalled, salaams at the door of his shop to a young Oxford undergrad. A melon-seller lifts his tray, heaped high with the golden fruit, to a middy, spick and span in regulation uniform; near by a water carrier, with picturesque goatskin filled with water from the Nile, utters his plaintive cry. A Zouave, brave in scarlet and gold, forces his way through a knot of fierce-looking Albanians, whose many-coloured sashes bristle with weapons. Jewesses, gorgeous in purple and fine linen, brilliant with flashing jewels, brush skirts with a slim English girl, severely tailor-made. An ever-moving, many-coloured crowd.

Through the throng, forcing their way to left and right, comes a troop of donkeys—in Cairo everyone rides a donkey—the shrill cry of their drivers mingling with the steady tramp of a battalion of our khaki warriors marching to the desert, the babble of the market-place, the strains of a passing band.

A medley of sound and sight, a vivid sense of life and motion. The quickness, the vigour of the West, side by side with the quiescence, the langour of the East. And over all the glorious sun, the wonderful blue sky, against which the minarets and domes of the innumerable mosques gleam white as ivory.

It was at that very moment, just when I was thinking of the mosques, that Crawley Drummond, who was wintering in Egypt, came on to the Piazza. And from that moment dates the commencement of that astonishing chapter in my life, a chapter that includes the strangest, the most exciting incidents. I refer to the time when I chaperoned Belinda.

"Lady Peggy," said Crawley, "just observe that man. He has been standing opposite the hotel for the past ten minutes, staring at you all the time. Is he an unknown or an accredited admirer?"

"Unknown—to me at any rate," I answered. "What is he do you think?"

"The ugliest man in Cairo, I should say, if the information's any good to you."

I leant forward, studying the stranger with attention. He was ugly, no doubt of that, with a massive, determined face and heavy jaw, but his figure, square-shouldered, broad-chested, lean flanked, and a certain carriage of his head, went far to redeem his plainness. I judged him to be about fifty years of age.

He puzzled me, there was no placing him. I could not determine his position in Society.

For quite three minutes after he had moved away, a tall figure in an easy fitting linen suit, I thought of him. One has time to think in Cairo. After the hurry and rush of the London season, the worry of giving and going to functions, the trouble of trying on frocks and marrying one's daughters, a winter in Egypt is rest indeed.

As I say, one has time to think, yet not a moment hangs heavy on your hands. Life in the hotels is very varied. Strange and familiar faces greet you every day. You smile a welcome to a man or woman whom you last met at Hurlingham, quiz an Eastern potentate, greet a rising politician, a distinguished general, a well-known author or a famous artist. You can know everyone, and yet be intimate with nobody but your own set.

The "ugliest man in Cairo" was not included in the latter, and his appearance that evening at *table d'hôte* so surprised me that I allowed a *salmi* of prawns to go untasted!

That idiot Crawley Drummond noticed my absence of mind, and giggled in a fashion quite unbefitting his years. Crawley and I are contemporaries, as I take care to remind him when he is annoying.

"Your admirer's name is Hardy North, dear Peggy," he whispered. "I gather that he is an Australian of much wealth but little family. In the frozen meat trade, I believe—he looks a sheepish person."

I was too annoyed about the prawns to care much about the Australian or his sheep. Still, I noticed his clothes were well-cut, and that he wore the right sort of collars. He was seated next the Duchess of Eastacres. Her Grace had entered into conversation with him. He had evidently been introduced.

"Wants him for her daughter," murmured Crawley. "She's an awful lean woman, is Lady Honoria. She won't have a look in with you, Peggy."

Crawley is, at times, positively irreverent. To speak in such a way of the dear Duchess' daughter is, indeed, indecent.

Her Grace seemed very favourably disposed to North, and introduced him to Honoria with a gracious wave of her hand.

The Australian's voice was louder than one cares to hear indoors, but his conversation must have been worth listening to, for Lady Honoria laughed several times. Generally speaking, the poor thing has not much sense of humour.

Now I don't deny for an instant that the Duchess has great perception, and doubtless she recognised Hardy as a man of worth. I must confess, however, I was surprised to see her quite so gracious.

There was a conversational lull at the table, and the Duchess' high-pitched voice was very audible.

"Ilderim's a delightful old person," she cried. "You must see his bazaar, Mr. North. A sheik I think he calls himself. He has the most wonderful collection of treasures you can imagine. Gorgeous tapestries, wonderful shawls, the sort of

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things one reads of in the 'Arabian Nights,' and finds in Cairo. Ilderim's a great favourite of mine, and will show you his most costly wares at my request."

"I should like to go," said the Australian calmly. "Can it not be this evening? I may have to leave Cairo shortly; I should like to see what I can of the place while I am here."

Her Grace hesitated, but her daughter displayed such unwonted pleasure at the idea that she consented.

"It will be lovely in the moonlight!" said Honoria; "quite too delightful!"

I thought her enthusiasm strange, and so did Crawley. Lady Honoria was a thin, anæmic looking girl who rarely showed enthusiasm for anything. Undeniably plain, her lack of looks and want of money—the Eastacres were horribly poor—found her well on in the twenties without a husband or a sign of one.

"They're making all the running, Peggy," whispered Crawley; "you'll have to hurry up or you'll get left."

Before I could answer him an unexpected, but by no means an unusual thing occurred.

The electric light went out!

Lamps were placed upon the table in readiness for this event, and the attendants made haste to light them. In the confusion of the darkness, however, somebody knocked over an epergne, which, in its turn, sent a lamp crashing on the table. The next moment the oil had caught alight, the table seemed ablaze. Before I knew what had happened my dress—a thin muslin, was in flames. I started to my feet with a shriek of terror. Instantly I felt myself clasped in two strong arms, a heavy rug was deftly thrown over me, covering my head and face and arms.

It was all over in a moment; what might have been a terrible accident was averted by quick thought, and prompt action. I emerged from the rug unhurt, only my sleeve and the lace on my bodice slightly scorched.

"A narrow escape," said a grave voice. I looked up and met the eyes of the ugliest man in Cairo!

"How can I thank you?"—much agitated—"you have saved my life."

"Not quite that, I think; I've saved you a few burns, no more," and, with a quiet bow, he left me. The danger was over, both I and the lamp were "out." But, and I could not forget it, had it not been for Hardy North, I should have been most horribly disfigured!

I hastily sought my room to repair damages. While I was curling my hair Lady Honoria appeared in a state of suppressed excitement. She was wearing a white gown quite decently made, and she had a pink colour in her cheeks.

"Dear Lady Peggy," she said, "are you better? We are all so distressed about you."

"I'm all right now, my dear," I answered briskly.

"You're coming with us to Ilderim's bazaar, aren't you?" she said. "Please say you will. I want you to come particularly."

I stared at her in astonishment. If, as Crawley suggested, Honoria had designs upon the Australian, I was the last person she should have asked to accompany her!

She seemed to read my thoughts, and came quite close to me with an awkward attempt to be caressing.

"I don't want to talk to Mr. North," she said. "And—you understand, dear Lady Peggy, don't you?"

As a matter of fact I was considerably mystified. If the millionaire was not the attraction, why should Lady Honoria so greatly desire the expedition. It wasn't as if she were young or romantic; a moonlight walk could not possibly appeal to her.

I felt suspicious. All the same there was no reason why I should not join the party. Hardy North would take pleasure in my society, and I owed him come consideration for his bravery. I decided to oblige Honoria and go to Ilderim's.

Ilderim's bazaar was some distance from our hotel. The Continental is in a quiet part of the Ezbekiya quarter, near the English church. Ilderim's bazaar lies at the other side of the town in the native quarter off the Mooski road.

As a rule, in Cairo, as in other Oriental cities, each bazaar is confined to the sale of one class of goods. Ilderim's, however, was an exception. His trade was principally with Europeans, and he catered for the taste of his customers. The Duchess was one of his chief patrons, and introduced all her friends to the venerable sheik. Crawley declared her Grace exacted a sort of percentage from the old man, and that a fresh customer meant a Cashmere shawl or a Tunis rug. But, as I say, Crawley is at times irreverent.

We found Ilderim seated cross-legged at his threshold. The hour was an unusual one for customers, most bazaars closing at sunset; but Ilderim was an unusual person, bland as an ambassador, or impassive as the Pyramids, according to occasion.

The interior of the bazaar or shop, as we should call it, was lit by soft-shaded lamps. Before us were revealed the secrets of his treasure-house. Cashmeres and broidered stuffs of peerless texture hung above our heads, round us were things of silver, of gold, of ivory, of amber, of feathers, of bronze, of emeralds, of ruby, of beryl, their rich colours glowing through the dim light.

Marvellous caskets of mother-of-pearl, carpets soft as down, and every brilliant hue melting one within the other. Coffee equipages of inimitable metal, silver statuettes exquisitely chased and wrought. Feather fans and screens of every beauty of device were spread before us. And the air was heavy with the odour of spice.

The Duchess, as usual, was in ecstasies, and directed North's attention to the most expensive articles. The Australian listened to her recommendations, which Crawley supplemented with whispered asides.

"What is the price of this?" said North, lifting a necklace of amber and gold.

Ilderim stated the amount, naming, in true Oriental fashion, just double what he intended to accept.

North realised he was being cheated, but seemed too careless or indifferent to mind.

"I'll take it," he said, pulling out his purse. "It would just suit my daughter."

His daughter! So the man was married.

The Duchess dropped the silver coffee pot she was inspecting with a clatter, and gazed at North in the stony Eastacres fashion. Nothing abashed, the Australian pocketed the necklace and resumed his observations.

"She's only seventeen," he went on, "though she looks more, being tall. I'm very proud of my girl." His face flushed beneath the Duchess' stare, and he turned to me.

"You see," he said softly, "she's no mother. My wife died when Belinda was a baby!"

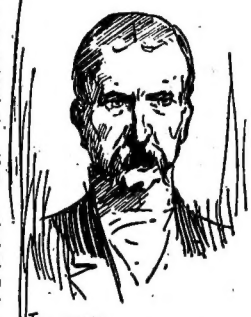
"Belinda! What a delightful name!" said the Duchess. A wife was a fatal obstacle, but a daughter might only be a drawback to her Grace's plans.

"It's a nice name," said North. His manner of speech was very simple and singularly direct. Different, very, from the tone of our set.

Crawley Drummond bargained for a set of chessmen, and I secured a dainty fan for Millicent. The Duchess contented herself with admiring our purchases. We were just about to leave when my attention was attracted by a curious and very lovely lamp hanging in the entry. It was very singular, a mingling of coloured glass, silver, gold, and ivory being wrought with much beauty in its formation.

"Isn't it gorgeous!" I cried; "just like Aladdin's wonderful lamp."

Ilderim salaamed and mentioned the cost—far more than I could dream of paying. One can't afford to buy things for art's sake nowadays. In a moment Hardy North signed to Ilderim to reach t down. He murmured a few



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

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words in the sheik's ears, and then, the bargaining over, we left the bazaar.

"I've told the old man to send the lamp to you at the Continental, Lady Peggy," said the Australian, in a matter-of-fact way. Really, he had no business to address me so familiarly.

"I know you're going to tell me that you won't accept it; that it's against the usages of Society, and so forth," he went on. "But, you see, I'm not in Society, so it doesn't matter. Where I come from we say right out when we want to make a friend of a man or a woman. I want you to be my friend."

"And so you give me a lamp? That sounds like bribery, Mr. North."

"May be. All the same I want you to take it. Come, you said I saved your life, you can't refuse me a small thing like a lamp?"

Considered in that light it was difficult to say no. In fact it was impossible. North was persistent and the lamp simply perfect.

I don't know exactly how it came about, but soon after the Australian and I found ourselves alone. We decided to extend our walk towards the Citadel, that grim fortress that frowns over the city of the Caliphs. Now the Citadel lies to the south-east of Cairo, and the Boulevard Mehemet Ali, the great modern highway, stretches straight as the crow flies, from the modern quarter to the gates of the Citadel itself. An electric tram runs the whole length of the Boulevard which is lit by electric lamps. A child could not mistake its bearings, much less a grown woman. Judge then, of my surprise when we reached the walls of the fortress and paused to gaze at its grim battlements; judge, I say, of my surprise when the Duchess in a state of great anxiety announced that Honoria had lost her way.

"It's impossible!" I said. "When did you miss her?"

"She was here not five minutes since," said her Grace. "Crawley and I were talking, and Honoria said she would go and meet you. She's not been back since, and what with camel-drivers and Bedouins, it's not safe for anyone to venture out alone."

"My dear Duchess, no one could come to any harm down the Boulevard," I said reassuringly. "It's as safe as the Brixton Road, and quite as well lighted."

Her Grace, however, was not so easily to be consoled. Finally, it was arranged that she and Crawley should walk along the Boulevard, while North and I searched in the neighbourhood of the Citadel.

It was quite silly, Lady Honoria being old enough, and in all conscience plain enough, to look after herself. Still it was a glorious night, and North was not altogether a dull companion, so I made no fuss, but set off to find, or rather look for, Lady Honoria.

I remember that night very distinctly, and for many reasons. Cairo lay before me, a wonderful, a glorious picture in the moonshine. Shadowy forms flitted through the deserted streets, quaint buildings in the native quarter, relics of Moorish palaces and ancient mosques, the frowning Citade flanked by the Mokattan Hills, in the distance, beyond the city walls, the mysterious, far-reaching desert, with its billows of sand, its fair islets of palm trees and fresh water all steeped in that wonderful light.

In our search for Honoria we drew near the gardens of an old Moorish palace now in ruins. The bitter-sweet of the mimosa, the heavy scent of the damask rose which grows in wild luxuriance throughout the East, made the night fragrant. Lofty trees cast a thick shadow on the earth, only the rustling of the leaves broke the stillness. It was a paradise for lovers!

"Look!" Hardy North grasped my arm, "under the trees there, through the break in the wall." I followed his eyes. A youth, tall and lithe, with the brown beauty of the East, a turban on his head and sandals on his feet, was clasping a woman in his arms. And she! Even now I cannot write the name with calmness, *she* was Honoria, daughter of the Duchess of Eastacres!

I could not speak to her, I merely waved my parasol and signed to North to shout. He didn't, but all the same Honoria came towards us. When she saw me she grew quite pale.

"Don't tell mother," she gasped. "I don't know what will become of me if you do."

Neither did I for that matter. The idea of the Duchess' despair at the thought of such a thing appalled me. Honoria, an aristocrat, an Englishwoman, embracing an Egyptian in a garden!

"Don't speak to me, please," I said, "I'm too shocked to listen to you."

We overtook Crawley and the Duchess half way towards the hotel, and I am glad to say her Grace scolded Honoria severely for what she called her carelessness. The rest of us walked home in silence.

"Are you going to report the girl?" whispered North in the vestibule.

"Of course," I answered. "I should be doing very wrong if I concealed it."

He nodded in a satisfied sort of way that surprised me.

As I passed up the stairs to my room later on that evening I turned in to the lounge to have a chat. The Continental boasts the nicest lounge of any hotel I know. It is a spacious place filled with hot-house plants, comfortable chairs, soft cushions, and pink-shaded lamps.

I sat down by Mrs. Murchison-Lee, a lively little American, and commenced to laugh and talk. I look back to that evening and wonder if ever again I can feel so happy, so lighthearted. Satisfied with myself and all the world, one moment. The next——!

Crawley Drummond, the centre of a group of men, was reading his mail, throwing out bits of gossip as he went along. Of a sudden he turned quite grave.

"Any of you fellows got money in Hammond's Bank?" he asked.

"Why?" said a chorus.

"Because"—Crawley's voice was very solemn—"they've gone smash. I shall lose a pretty penny, and poor Lady Peggy, Carstairs' widow, don't you know——"

I interrupted passionately.

"It isn't true," I cried. "Crawley, say it isn't true." I rose to my feet and staggered blindly towards him. "My money, the money I have earned so hardly, so cruelly, gone from me. My money!" I couldn't breathe, the room swam before me. I put out my hands to save myself from falling. Somebody grasped them firmly, and led me gently through the crowd.

Once again Hardy North had intervened to save me.

I don't know how I got to my room. I remember North putting me into the lift and bringing me some brandy, but after that there came a blank, until I found myself lying on the bed, cold and shivering.

I am no coward, I have been through scenes that would have wrung most women's hearts, and never faltered. I have borne trouble the thought of which would make most women shrink and made no sign. But, as I sat there with the consciousness that I must start life afresh, my heart failed me. I turned sick and faint.

What could I do, what could I do? I had nothing to turn to, nowhere to go. I had married my daughters brilliantly, but they were not so grateful as they should have been. I could not make my home with one, not even Millicent. And yet I had nothing, *nothing*.

I caught my breath and stared blankly before me. What should I do, what would become of me? Through the long

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night I sat, until the dawn broke over the city, lighting the East as with a golden torch.

About half-past seven my maid brought my tea. There was a note on the tray in a writing that I did not know. I opened it with curiosity.

"Please see me this morning," ran the missive, "if possible by eight o'clock. I shall call at your sitting-room at that hour. I have something of importance to say to you, important to you and me. HARDY NORTH."

Important to you and me!

Could it be, was it possible, had Crawley been right after all? Indescribably flustered I hurried on a pale pink *peignoir*, and bade Marie dress my hair becomingly.

Then, with palpitating heart, I hurried to my sitting-room. Hardy North was there already.

"I'm glad to see you're better, Lady Carstairs," he said. "It's very kind of you to see me at such an early hour, even before you've breakfasted. I appreciate it, I assure you."

I motioned him to take a seat; he placed himself beside me.

"Lady Carstairs," he said abruptly, "you've lost all your money, I understand?"

"Yes—all!" I said piteously.

He nodded sympathetically. Then—

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Really, Mr. North——"

"Please don't be offended," he interrupted quickly. "I'm very sorry for you, Lady Carstairs. It's dreadful for a woman of your position to be placed like this. I merely wanted to know if you had formed any plans as to your future. If not, you may be inclined to consider a suggestion I have to make to you."

"I've no plans—at present," I said.

"Well, then, you may consent to what I propose. It will strike you as sudden, not to say strange, Lady Carstairs, but I am used to think and to act quickly." He paused, and I felt horribly agitated.

"I want you, Lady Carstairs, to——" he paused again and looked long and earnestly at me. "To chaperon my daughter," he said slowly.

I gasped, I couldn't help it, the proposition was so very unexpected. Then with an effort I pulled myself together.

"Pray explain yourself, Mr. North," I said stiffly.

"It's like this," he answered. "I've set my heart on my girl making a success in Society. I'm no good at that sort of thing myself, I'm too rough and ready. But under the care of a lady like yourself Belinda would have every chance. I want her to marry well—not money, I've enough of that; but a title, a man of standing and of family. I want you to take her over here and now. I'll allow you ten thousand pounds for your expenses, and Belinda can have what she wants besides. If she marries as I wish her, on her wedding day I'll hand you a cheque for twenty thousand pounds. But"—he looked at me keenly, "Belinda mustn't know a word of it. Say, do you accept?"

For a moment I could not answer; the interview had turned out so differently from what I had expected. Still, twenty thousand pounds was not to be despised. I determined then and there to win it.

"I want you to travel about, to let the girl see the world. I don't mind where you go, I'll leave the route to you."

"Tell me, Mr. North," I said, "are your daughter's affections free—that is to say, has she had any love affairs? Girls at that age are apt to be romantic."

"I understand you," he said quickly. "As a matter of fact, I believe Belinda was rather taken with an Englishman she met on board the steamer, a civil engineer come over here to accept a Government appointment. Mere girlish frivolity. Nothing serious. You understand?"

"Yes," I answered quietly, "I quite understand. Your daughter is seventeen, I think you told me, Mr. North?"

"Eighteen in July."

I smiled, the twenty thousand pounds was as good as mine already. A girl of seventeen would be as putty in my hands!

"And where is your daughter, Mr. North?"

He glanced round, a sudden light in his face. "Look," he said, pointing across the room.

I turned, and there in the doorway stood — Belinda!

Belinda was a beauty.

No matter what she did, or what she wore, the fact remained the same. Beautiful with the unconscious loveliness born of the forest, the hillside, the wild, free places of the earth. More than common tall, her head set proudly on her shoulders, she stood before me like a young Greek goddess.

When I recovered my astonishment—Belinda always took people's breath away—I gathered the details of her appearance. She was very fair and slightly freckled, with wonderful blue eyes, large, wide open, fearless as a child's. Her nose was small and delicately shaped, and her mouth—the feature which spoils most faces—was perfect. Not a rosebud by any means, but with fine flexible lips that revealed a dazzling row of teeth. For the rest her hair, which hung in a thick plait below her waist, was brown, with curling, golden ends.

But her costume! When I tell you that her skirt was what the women's papers call "home-made," and that her blouse bagged horribly at the waist, you will realise the condition of her wardrobe.

That a girl could wear such terrible garments and yet remain a beauty speaks volumes.

"Belinda," said her father, "come here and speak to Lady Carstairs."

The girl stepped forward and surveyed me with a calm, critical gaze.

"How do you do?" she said. Then, "Have you and father been quarrelling? You seem to have been crying."

I gasped. How on earth could I teach this goddess in a badly-fitting skirt what her father described as "the usages of polite Society!"

Hardy North quickly intervened.

"Lady Carstairs has promised to take you under her wing, Belinda. She is going to show you the world, and introduce you into Society."

"What about you, father?" she remarked. "Where do *you* come in?"

I frowned at the atrocious slang. Young married women are allowed a certain latitude in language, young girls never.

North hesitated. Then laying his hand on his daughter's shoulder he looked fixedly in her eyes.

"I'm going back to Australia," he said. "I intend to leave you in Lady Carstairs' hands from now until"—he paused—"until you're married. I've thought the matter carefully out, Belinda, and I've decided that's the best thing I can do. I've great hopes and great ambitions for you. While you are with me there's no possibility of these ambitions being realised. I'm a man of the people; a rich man, but one to whom the customs of another and higher class feel strange. I want you to belong to this other class, to live in it, to feel at home in it. And so, for a time, I'm going to give you up."

Belinda listened attentively, then, with a shrug, she seated herself upon the corner of the table. "I'm quite satisfied with you, father, and your class too," she said.

North frowned. "I'm not going to argue the matter," he said firmly; "it's for me to order, for you to obey. I'm giving you a chance—the chance of your life. Later, you will understand and be grateful."

"Well," said the girl slowly, "tell me exactly what this chance is."

"You're to travel with Lady Carstairs. You'll see all the cities of Europe, meet all that is distinguished, clever, great in

Society. Know everybody, learn everything, go everywhere, under the guidance of a woman who knows it all."

"It sounds nice," said Belinda, taking a piece of chocolate from her pocket and nibbling it with relish. "Anything else?"

"Yes. It is my great hope that you will marry well."

"You mean a clever and a good man, father?"

"Something besides that, Belinda. A man with an old and an ennobled name. A man who comes of a family known and reverenced for generations."

"You mean a title, don't you?" said Belinda. "Well, I can't exactly promise to marry a title. Even for your sake I wouldn't have a husband that I didn't care the world for."

"My dear, for the type of man I speak of you would surely care?"

"Perhaps. But suppose I met someone who hadn't a title, and yet was clever and noble just the same. What then, father?"

"Are you referring to anyone in particular?" said Mr. North.

"N-no." Belinda seemed confused.

"Then the question doesn't arise. It will give me the greatest happiness in life if you marry as I wish, Belinda. Lady Carstairs understands my wishes and will do her best to carry them out. You will not oppose me? You will not see, nor meet, nor write to any man of whom I should disapprove?"

"If you mean David Carr, father—and I suppose you do—I'll give my word not to see or write to him without telling Lady Carstairs first. I can't promise more."

North gave me a troubled glance, but I signed to him to leave the matter as it was. Belinda was not likely to meet a detrimental while I had the care of her!

"I think you are making a mistake, you know, Dad," the girl continued; "but if your heart is set on sending me away I won't offer any opposition."

"That's my good girl. And now," he took out his watch, "I must be going. The boat leaves at noon, and I have much to do."

"I'll go on to Shepheard's and pack up," she said, and, with a nod to me, Belinda slid gracefully from the table and sauntered from the room.

"We put up at Shepheard's," Hardy North explained. "I left Belinda there when I came here last night."

"Mr. North," I said abruptly, "what made you come to the Continental?"

He paused; then, with a laugh and a flush, he took my hand.

"You mustn't be angry, Lady Peggy," he said softly. "When I passed the hotel yesterday and saw you in the sunshine on the piazza, I felt you were the one woman with whom I could trust my daughter. It was horribly presumptuous of me, I know, but I decided then and there to try and persuade you to be Belinda's friend and chaperon."

"And then," I said, "the bank smashed and I was ruined. Fortune played into your hands, Mr. North."

"It did, indeed!" he said gently. "And now to business. Here," he took out his pocket-book, "you will find notes for £500. The balance of the sum we agreed upon, £9,500, I will pay into the bank here on your account. Spend what is necessary for Belinda, Lady Carstairs, I shall grudge no expense, and send me on the bills. Good-bye and many thanks." He pressed my hand, and with a smile and bow departed.

I looked at my notes and thought of the balance at the bank. Decidedly the interview had brought its compensations!

I told Crawley what had happened, and he was much impressed and very pleased. We decided that he should inform the Duchess and our set in general that a considerable portion of my fortune had been saved from the wreck. Belinda, we agreed, should be regarded as an adjunct to my income.

The Duchess was deeply disappointed at North's abrupt departure, but revived somewhat at the intelligence that Belinda was a considerable heiress. I was quite prepared, and by no means displeased to learn the next morning that her Grace's son, the Duke of Eastacres, was expected shortly at the Continental.

"Dear Lawson's chest is *so* delicate," explained the Duchess. "He's suffered terribly of late. I'm hoping wonders from a winter in Cairo, however."

I murmured my sympathy, and we exchanged glances of understanding. Glances are quite as explanatory and much less compromising than words. It was as good as settled between us that the Duke should propose to Belinda. And, unless I was very much mistaken, Belinda would accept him.

The Duke was about five-and-thirty. A slight figure, just about the middle height; he had a fair skin, fair hair and pale grey eyes. High-bred from the crown of his well-shaped head to the tips of his aristocratic fingers. A little cold, perhaps, and decidedly reserved in manner. But in these days of demonstration reserve is a relief if not a virtue.

The Duke's title was old, but his income was small. The Eastacres had the gaming fever in their blood, and his Grace had long since gambled away his own and his sister's fortune. Rumour said he was as near to ruin as a Duke could be. Now Belinda's millions would reinstate his family's glory, pay his debts and dower Honoria. It would be in every way a most desirable match. I decided that it should take place.

My first act in connection with Belinda was to make away with her entire wardrobe. There are plenty of *modistes* in Cairo, and in a very short time I had fitted her out. She grumbled somewhat at the length of her skirts, complaining that she could neither walk nor run, nor climb trees with any degree of comfort! I managed to soothe her, however, with the promise of a tailor-made gown, and she finally consented to put on a dainty chiffon frock trimmed with lace for her first appearance.

I must confess I felt proud of my charge. With her plentiful brown hair coiled about her slender head, her slim white throat clasped with a necklet of pearls, she looked not only lovely but distinguished.

The Duke was immensely taken. He was extremely fastidious, and I had feared Belinda's girlishness might jar his mature taste. I was mistaken, however, he stared at her in evident surprise and admiration.

"The Duke admires you, dear," I said to her in confidence. "You ought to feel very proud."

"Why?" she asked, with wide blue eyes.

"My dear child, he has seen the most beautiful, the most charming women in the world. And yet he cares to notice you, a little girl from the wilds of Australia."

"He didn't say much worth listening to," Belinda answered. "And he's very little to look at. I never did admire small men. Now, David Carr," Belinda's voice grew a touch rebellious, "is six foot if he's an inch."

"Where is Mr. Carr now, my dear?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. He told me he was stopping in Cairo for the next week or two, but as he's not come to see me I suppose he's left. Gone up the Nile to the irrigation works perhaps."

"Perhaps," I returned, with a smile.

As a matter of fact I had seen David Carr the day before. He had called on Belinda; I as her chaperon had interviewed him. I explained to the young man how matters stood and intimated that I should prohibit any further intercourse between him and my charge. He departed much depressed but convinced of the impossibility of his suit. Of this, however, I did not inform Belinda.

That evening was the occasion of a religious festival in Cairo, and we decided to go out and see the town. The

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Duke met us in the vestibule with his mother and Lady Honoria. After due consideration I had decided not to tell the Duchess of Honoria's misconduct; at any rate not yet. Crawley Drummond was also of the party; he knew Cairo well, and generally dispensed with the services of a dragoman or guide. On this occasion, however, as the streets were likely to be very crowded, I suggested he should engage the services of one. He selected a tall, fine-looking Bedouin, who promised safe conduct through the streets. He was a civil fellow and spoke English well.

Cairo that evening was a brilliant scene. The Mooski was thronged, and we had difficulty to force our way among the people. Mousma, however, our good-looking dragoman, cleared a path for us. We turned into one of the narrow lanes of the great Khan—or large, covered market-place. The picture before us was like a scene from the Arabian Nights.

The long bazaar was lighted with innumerable chandeliers and coloured lamps and candles, and covered by awnings of rich shawls and stuffs. The shops had changed their character. Each was turned into a tasteful reception room. Seated in a richly-hung recess one could watch the crowd go by, while the sound of drums and fifes, the low chant of a story-teller recanting some favourite tale, the cries of a band of passing dervishes filled the air.

Mousma called our attention to a band of these same dervishes. They were about to enter a mosque, and he suggested we should follow and witness their performance. It seemed a risky thing to do, we were infidels and the passions of the Moslems might easily be turned against us. Mousma, however, reassured us. We made our way into the mosque.

The performance of the twirling dervishes is a weird and fascinating one. They stand in a circle, their eyes fixed on their sheik who remains in the centre of the group to direct and control their movements like the leader of an orchestra. At a given signal they commenced to dance and twirl round and round at the rate of sixty to a thousand times a minute. To keep this up for nearly half an hour without a single stop is a fearful and wonderful accomplishment.

We bent forward eagerly watching the countenances of the dancers. It was curious to contrast the strange quietude of their faces with the ceaseless movement of their bodies, the swaying motions of their arms. Round and round they went till one's brain grew dizzy at the sight.

It was horrible, yet fascinating to see. We were all more or less affected by it. The dear Duchess shook her head, tapped her feet, and for a moment showed a decided disposition to join the throng. Crawley gazed with flushed face and strained eyes, even the Duke lost something of his nonchalance. Honoria had already dissolved in tears—excitement always affected her in that way, and Belinda!

Heavens, that mad, that infatuated girl had become so absorbed with the performance that she had approached the dancers, and with a grave face and determined air, was commencing to emulate the antics of a dervish.

"It's not so difficult," she cried in her fresh young voice.

As she spoke she swung round, her arms extended, coming into contact with one of the dancers. Considerably astonished, the dervishes stopped their gyrations, and gazed solemnly at Belinda. They did not appear at all angry, only astonished. Possibly they thought she was overcome with religious enthusiasm, possibly the fact of her exceeding fairness had something to do with their amiability.

Anyway, their attitude was quite friendly, and there was no cause at all for apprehension. Certainly there was no reason for the surprising conduct of the Duchess. Seized apparently with the fear that the entirely well-intentioned dervishes had designs upon her life, she gave a wild, though somewhat high-pitched scream, and fled as if for dear life—I never thought the Duchess could have run so fast—until she gained the shelter of a friendly bazaar.

There was nothing for us to do but to follow her, Mousma clearing a way through the astonished populace. I noticed he laid tight hold of Belinda, fearing, perhaps, that she would do something rash if not restrained.

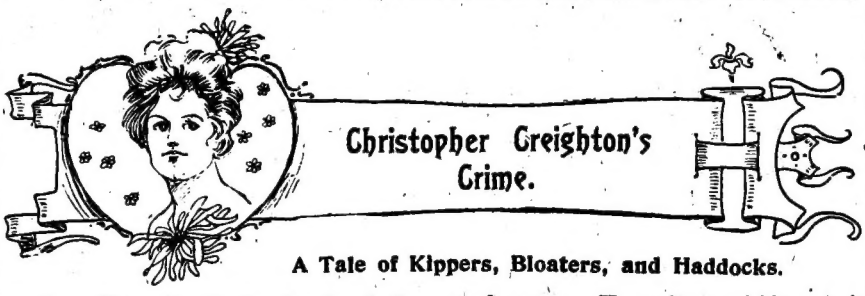
I thanked him for his care. He released Belinda and politely bowed.

"It is nothing," he said, "it is——"

Belinda interrupted him. She did more. She launched herself into his arms.

"It is you—*you*!" she screamed. "Lady Peggy, Lady Peggy! He's not a dragoman at all. He's David—David Carr!"

(*Interesting developments will be recorded next Tuesday.*)



Christopher Creighton's Crime.

A Tale of Kippers, Bloaters, and Haddocks.

It was the most exciting episode in the calm of Miss Thornton's existence.

She stood on the busy north pavement of the Strand. It was a foggy afternoon in November. The clocks had just struck five. She kept quite still amid all the bustle of the great London thoroughfare, her eyes fixed on a bank on the opposite side of the road. Sometimes a string of vehicles or foot-passengers obstructed her view of the door which she watched as a cat watches a mouse's hole. At such times she craned her neck in all directions, so anxious was she not to lose sight of the bank.

It was evident from the fact that she stood so far away and did not cross the road to a spot whence she would have had a less obstructed view, that she did not wish to be seen by the person or persons whom she waited to see.

Sometimes she consulted her small gold watch by the aid of the light which emanated from the shop windows and the street lamps and made the fog visible. The person or persons for whom she was waiting must have been late.

Presently she darted along the pavement towards Charing Cross. A young man had come out of the bank door and gone in that direction. With feline discretion she tracked him, keeping ever to her own side of the road. He turned up by St. Martin's Church and went along Charing Cross Road, across Oxford Street, and on through Tottenham Court Road, holding ever a northward course. He walked quickly and it was only with difficulty that she could maintain his pace. When she passed under the street lamps, her pale, eager face showed how tired she was.

On and on he strode, until he reached a somewhat disreputable-looking street, pretty far north. Here he suddenly disappeared into a little shop which had red blinds aglow with the interior illumination. She stood on the pavement, panting, hesitating, questioning. What could he be doing here? It could not be for any good purpose that he had come to this suspicious-looking place, whose ruddy blinds hid its contents and its business. She stayed there hesitating for several minutes. Then she resolutely opened the door, also red with an illuminated blind, and entered.

She was quite taken aback by the scene and the odour. It was an eating-house. In wooden boxes or compartments, like old-fashioned church pews on an exaggerated scale, sat perhaps a dozen people, some of them evidently not belonging

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to the aristocracy, eating with undisguised appetites. A quick glance around showed her that the person whom she had been following was not there. She went up to the counter, behind which stood, staring at her with inquisitive eyes, a pert-looking young lady who, to any more appreciative taste than Miss Thornton's might have appeared not altogether ill-looking.

"Hasn't a young gentleman just come in here?" she asked.

"There are a number of young gentlemen here," replied the girl, with a comprehensive sweep of the hand.

"I mean a *gentleman*," reiterated Miss Thornton, with a very marked emphasis on the word, and a quick glance of scorn at the shady creatures in the pews.

"Perhaps you mean Mr. Creighton?"

"I do."

"You wish to see him?"

"Yes. But before I see him I should like to speak with some responsible person. Can I see your master or mistress?"

"The manageress has pricked her finger, ma'am, and can't be seen. Perhaps I shall do."

Miss Thornton was too agitated to notice very particularly the girl's rudeness.

"Perhaps so. I only want to ask a few questions."

"All right, ma'am. I'm ready."

"Please tell me exactly why Mr. Creighton comes here. I am responsible for him and must know the truth. If you will reveal all I will reward you."

The maid's eyes had a new glitter in them. Here was a chance not often thrown in her way.

"Wait a minute, ma'am, and I'll see what I can do."

She went into a neighbouring room—the kitchen evidently—where her voice was indistinctly heard playing a low-toned duet with that of another maiden. In about two minutes she returned.

"Now, ma'am," she said, "I'll tell you all I know. Mr. Creighton comes here every evening except Sunday, and has tea in a private room."

"Yes?"

"That's all."

"Nonsense. Why should he have tea here? He can get all he wants at home."

"I don't know anything about that, ma'am. He comes, and he has his teas, and he pays for 'em."

"And does he take tea quite alone?"

"Well, ma'am——"

She hesitated.

"Mind, I want you to tell me everything, and I promise you shall not be the loser by it."

"Well, ma'am, I suppose he is always alone—except for——for——"

"Except what?"

"Except for the——"

"Go on. Quick!"

"The girl who——"

"The *girl?*"

"Well, ma'am, just you come with me and peep."

"No. I don't want to see anything. You must tell me all, and——"

Here, in a significant way, she took out her purse.

"But, ma'am, it's difficult to explain, and if you'd only just take a look at them."

"*Them?*" exclaimed Miss Thornton, in her most scornful tone.

"Yes, ma'am, just one little peep," and, going to a place screened off from the counter, the girl pushed back a thick curtain from a square window, showing a little room, in which the young gentleman sat at the table, while close beside him was a rather pretty girl with a bush of frizzy brown hair, and neatly dressed in black with a dainty white apron. Just at the moment when the curtain was pulled back the girl seemed to be patting the young gentleman on the cheek, laughing meanwhile with a shrill ripple that seemed to Miss Thornton to be an audible quintessence of the minx's forwardness.

Miss Thornton almost screamed.

"I don't want to see any more," she said, and, dropping a sovereign into the delighted girl's hand, she fled the unholy place.

* * * * * *

In her cosy drawing-room Miss Thornton awaited with palpitating eagerness the arrival of her nephew. His parents who were in India, had put him in a London bank and left him for Miss Thornton to look after. She had rejoiced in having him; for she was a woman with well-developed views concerning the training of youths and their safe conduct through the muddy waters of degenerate day. And it is not every spinster who has an opportunity of experimenting. Old-maidish to the finger-tips, she tried to be a kind of break-water to this youth, keeping from him all the troubled and bitter waters of the sea of life that would otherwise have beaten upon him. But after he had been only a few months with her, she felt that her power over him was lessening, and that there were corners of his life to which she did not penetrate. His recent habit of coming home late for dinner worried her a good deal. There was no excuse for it. Between the closing of the bank and dinner-time four hours elapsed. What did he do with himself in this interval? She had failed to find out. He maintained a stubborn reticence. And so it was that the lady braced herself to the quest upon which we have seen her.

Christopher was later than usual to-night. When she heard him coming she trembled all over.

"Well, aunt," he said, "you have the best of it here. It's miserably foggy in the streets."

She knew it only too well. She said:

"Chris, I know all."

Her tone was almost comically solemn.

He smiled.

"Yes? And so do I. Here's your sovereign back again."

Miss Thornton sank into a chair, staring at the shining coin he held out to her.

Assuming, in his turn, a look of solemnity, Christopher continued:

"I am sorry, aunt, that you did not trust me more. You would have been saved from being the victim of a practical joke. The thing was just arranged on the spot by the two waitress girls. I tell you I was pretty considerably taken aback by the creature's impudence; but I am afraid that if I'd known you were looking on I should have laughed. The girls were frank enough to tell me all about it afterwards. I rowed them well, of course, made them give back the sovereign, and foreswore the place altogether."

"Then you won't see her again—you promise me?"

"See her again? What do you mean?"

"I mean you won't go anywhere else to see her?"

"What! Do you think I go there to see that minx of a waitress? Haven't I told you that the scene was improvised for your benefit and your bribe?"

"But what *do* you go there for?"

"Why, for the kippers, of course."

"The kip——"

"Yes; the kippers, the bloaters and the haddocks."

Miss Thornton sat with open mouth.

"You know, aunt, that I asked you often, months ago, to let me have cured fish. You told me that such things were vulgar, plebeian, and all that kind of thing, and would not let me have them. Well, that made me want them all the more. I felt I could not drag through the day without a bloater or a kipper with my afternoon tea; so, as you would not let me have them at home, I went out for them. That's all. And, I say, aunt, that shop's the best in London for fish teas and suppers. But I'm not going there again. Perhaps you'll let me have my afternoon kipper at home now?"

"Well, yes, my boy, if you are so set on it."

"Thank you, aunt."

"But I think you'd better have it in the breakfast room. It wouldn't be so noticeable when we have visitors."

And on these terms the pact was made.

W. G. Locket.

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A FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER.

The Sequel to a Seaside Meeting.

Ned Singleton put his hands on the sides of his skiff, and, leisurely raising himself into a sitting posture, looked around. While he had been lying at the bottom of the boat absorbed in thought, and dandled by the gentle swell, the tide had carried him at least a couple of miles below the town. Dipping his sculls into the water, Ned began to pull slowly back to his starting point. As he neared the town again most of the passing boats were gay with brightly-coloured sun-shades under which reclined girls dressed in cool-looking cream and white. A few of the fair visions were rowing, but the majority seemed quite content to occupy the stern of the craft, where they could display their latest confections for the admiration of their escorts and criticise at their ease the toilets of the other ladies.

On the right, the sea, sparkling under the sunbeams, stretched away, a sheet of molten silver, till it reached the horizon, while a thin line of smoke, hardly visible to the eye of a landsman, betrayed the presence of some outward bound steamer. On the left, beach and parade were gay with bright dresses; while the stirring strains of the "Soldier's Chorus," played by the military band, sounded pleasantly across the water.

Ned's serious face was rather a contrast to all the gaiety around him. For some time he had been trying to decide upon making a proposal of marriage. Though he preferred to think that there was little doubt of his suit being favourably received, the lady of his choice being of humble birth, whereas his father was a high dignitary of the Established Church, there were several circumstances in connection with the affair which caused him anxiety.

Their first meeting occurred during the summer. Picturing it to himself for the hundredth time, he again marvelled at its strangeness. Early one morning, as he was strolling through some of the narrow streets of the older part of the town, he had lighted upon the fish market. It was a queer little place, consisting of four or five stone slabs upon which the fish were exposed for sale. Noticing some fine soles, he had gone closer to look at them, when a young girl came out of a sort of little cupboard behind the stone counter. Her face was not exactly beautiful; she had no classic regularity of feature; but her keen, intellectual eyes, her dignified carriage, and the refined tones in which she asked him what he wanted, immediately struck Ned as being curiously out of place in such a situation. Upon hearing what he required, she called out "Dad," but receiving no reply said: "He'll come and serve you in a minute," and was retreating into the cupboard again, when Ned, prompted by some mediæval reminiscence out of an old French book he had been reading, doffed his cap, and, bowing low, exclaimed: "The fish were worth four times the price, fair maid, if 'twere served by thy own fair hands."

She looked at him sharply, hesitated a moment, then, catching his humour, replied in the same strain: "In sooth, good sir, thou valuest my hands right royally. To quadruple the price of the fish were well worth a washing, yet will I charge you but another moiety for your compliment." Taking up those he selected, she spoke a few words to a weatherbeaten old fisherman who came up just then, and smilingly handed the fish to Ned.

Undaunted by his expensive experience, he found himself strolling in the same direction on the following morning, and, indeed, for many mornings afterwards. She was not always there, but the old salt who took her place, seemed benevolently disposed towards Ned, and quite willing to talk about the virtues of his daughter. When he got to know her a little better, Ned found his first impression had been correct. She was far better educated than he had thought and seemed a lady in every respect. Glancing from the rough, coarse-featured old man, whose speech and manners were those of his class, to the refined, neatly-dressed girl beside him, it seemed incredible that he could be the father of such a daughter. Whether influenced by Ned's lavish presents of tobacco, or his extensive orders for fish, which the young fellow had a good deal of trouble to dispose of, the old man began to grow increasingly friendly towards him, and afforded him every opportunity of making himself agreeable to the young lady—a privilege of which Ned was not slow to take advantage.

During the rest of his holiday he saw her almost every day. Soon she seemed to expect him, and they went about a good deal together. The more he had of her company, the more he admired her; and, by the time his holiday was over, he was as much in love as a man could be.

All through the winter Ned took great care to keep in touch with his new friends, sending the old man tobacco, and the girl little knick-knacks; while he got them more orders for fish than they were able to fulfil. He had asked Ella for her address, but the most he could obtain from her had been a promise to meet him next summer. Summer had come again; she had kept her promise, and, in his eyes, she seemed more beautiful and desirable than ever. He had made up his mind that to-morrow he would ask her to become his wife. Hitherto she had fenced with him, and in some way or other prevented him coming to the point whenever he broached the subject; but this time he was determined not to be put off.

"I'm sure she loves me," he said to himself, and the thought sent the blood coursing through every vein, while the vigorous strokes of his sculls drove the little skiff through the water like a torpedo boat.

* * * * *

Ned had carried out his resolution. The two were sitting on a grassy bank shaded by stately elms. At intervals the fresh morning breeze, laden with the perfume of clover and hay, made a gentle rustling overhead.

"And you are sure—quite sure, Ned, that you will never regret marrying a common fisher-girl," she asked.

"You are not a common fisher-girl," he replied warmly. "And if you were—if you were a beggarmaid, it would be all the same; for I love you, Ella."

"But think of your parents. What will they say when they hear of it? Cottage folk are apt to be awkward and out of place in the drawing-room."

"You would not be out of place in a palace. Besides, what does it matter to them? You are not going to marry my relations, or I yours. Don't let silly social distinctions stand in the way of our love."

And he seized her hand, and poured out a torrent of passionate pleading.

She let him keep it for a few seconds, looking straight in front of her with a curious smile in her liquid brown eyes Then she softly drew it away.

"Listen, my dear," she began. "In the olden days before a knight gained the hand of his mistress, he performed some gallant feat of arms, killed a dragon or some other unfortunate

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beast in order to prove his love for her. I like to think that there is still some romance left in the world, and I want my knight to do something for me. Will he do it?"

"My lady has but to name the task," he said.

She laughed. "Well, as the dragons are all dead, you will have to be content with smaller game. What I want you to do is something quite different, but perhaps more difficult.

"You have only to say what, and it is done."

"Bravely spoken, noble sir. Now you shall come and give me a taste of your quality. There are three things I want you to do—that is the proper, mediæval number, isn't it?—the first this morning, the second and third this afternoon; and then——

"No, not yet," she exclaimed, pushing him away. "You must do your duty first. She got up from her seat, and walked briskly in the direction of the town. Ned followed her, wondering what was going to happen. She did not speak until they reached the fish market. Then she said: "You are ready to prove your words? You are quite sure of yourself?"

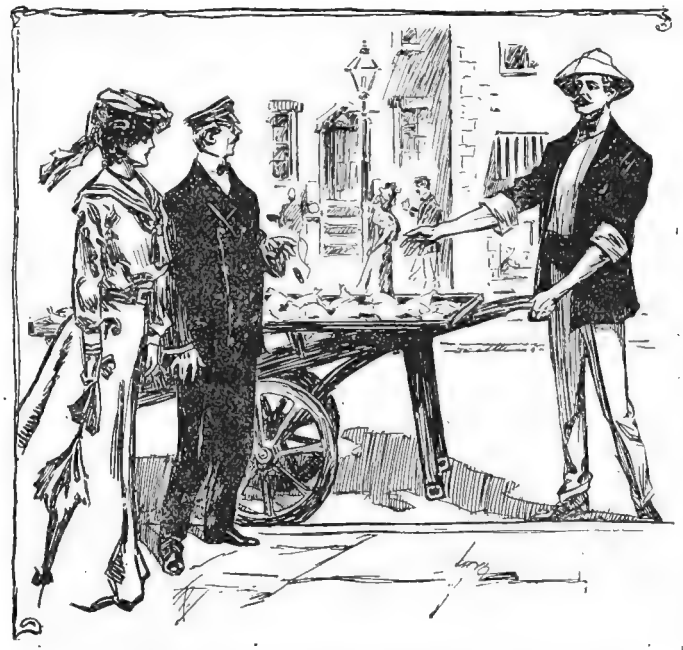
"Try me," he replied.

She pointed to the fisherman's barrow covered with some freshly caught plaice. "That is your first task. Take that barrow, and cry those fish for me along the parade. Then shall I know that you do not despise the calling of my father."

The family pride of the Singletons drove the warm blood into Ned's face till it was as scarlet as a cardinal's hat, and, for a few seconds he stood still and said nothing.

She watched him attentively. "Well, my gallant dragon-slayer, is the task too hard for you?"

At the sound of her mocking words he recovered himself. "In sooth, my lady," he replied, "'tis the easiness of it that has disappointed me. I had hoped for a foe more worthy of my steel."



"How are you, old chap? Want some fish? You can have the lot for a couple of bob."

"'Tis one that will test your pride, and he that is faithful in a few things—so, if you are not ashamed——"

He pushed the barrow into the street. "Since my father is a servant of St. Peter, 'twould ill become his family to be ashamed of the calling of the apostle," he said. But he thought otherwise. He pictured the look upon the face of his father, the bishop; the horror-stricken expression of his respectable mother, and the scornful grief of his superior sisters could they see him now. And, as he thought of their consternation, his feeling of mortification changed to one of amusement, and he laughed merrily to himself as he turned on to the parade.

At first his appearance created a good deal of attention. A well-set-up young man in panama hat, spotless flannels, and light-brown boots, pushing a barrow of plaice, was rather a change from the usual mahogany-faced, blue-jerseyed, sea-booted boatman. But he buckled himself to it, and soon a crowd of gaily dressed people, ready to welcome any distraction, however trivial, stood still and watched him as he passed, listening with an amused expression on their faces to the customary fisherman's cry of "Rye Bay plaice, Rye Bay plaice," rendered in a light, musical baritone.

Ignoring the bands of children who gathered at his heels and the general interest he was creating, Ned went doggedly on with his task, and, before he reached the south end of the parade, succeeded in disposing of most of his goods. Ella had not stipulated that he should sell the fish at any particular price, and he took advantage of her omission to ask a considerably lower figure than that usually charged. But his ordeal was not quite over.

"They look nice fish," said a lady accompanied by a cavalier, arrayed in an eyeglass and a most glorious yachting suit perfumed with the odours of Araby. The amateur fisherman looked up. There was no mistaking Harold Mortimer, the biggest dandy in the Temple. Their eyes met, and the latter stood dumfounded with amazement.

"How are you, old chap?" Ned exclaimed, mischievously holding out a hand which bore unsavoury traces of his lately adopted occupation. "Want some fish? You can have the lot for a couple of bob."

Mr. Mortimer reddened and hesitated. "Yes, send them along to that address," he said, pretending not to see Ned's extended hand, but depositing a card and a couple of shillings on the barrow hurriedly walked on. For a moment Ned felt inclined to hurl his money after him; but after a few seconds he smiled to himself and dropped the coins into his pocket. Then he delivered the remainder of his fish at the proper address, and, with a feeling of relief, wheeled his empty barrow in the direction of the market.

On the way he met Ella. She was in a hurry, and just stopping to say "This afternoon at four," passed on. Giving a boy a shilling to take the barrow to its destination, Ned went to his lodgings wondering what the afternoon had in store for him; but feeling that after his morning's experience he was capable of anything.

At the appointed time he walked towards the pier. A little knot of people were standing near the water admiring a tiny yacht, which was apparently a new arrival. As he walked down the steps on to the beach he saw Ella coming along the parade.

"I'm dying to know what my second task is to be," he said, looking admiringly at her rosy cheeks and bright eyes sparkling with suppressed excitement. "I hope it's nothing else in the fish line."

She laughed. "You haven't forgiven me then. No, I'm going to test your seamanship this afternoon, and see if it is worthy of the husband of a fisherman's daughter. What do you think of her?" and she proudly pointed to the little craft before them, at the same time tossing her mackintosh and several other parcels into the stern of the boat.

"But how?—where?—whose?" he began.

"Now, sir, no questions, please."

A dozen willing hands assisted them to launch the boat,

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and in a few minutes they were running past the head of the pier.

"Which way is the wind?" said Ella.

"Nor' west," said Ned, who was steering.

"Good; now I want you to steer south-east. That ought to take us straight to Calais, oughtn't it?"

"Yes," he replied, "but I hope you don't expect to get there to-day with this tide."

"Will you please cease your objections, sir, and remember your vow of obedience."

"I'll lay her course for the North Pole if you like," he said, looking fondly at her.

As they were running before the wind, and the sea was comparatively smooth, the boat wanted little attention, and Ned's eyes continually rested upon the smart little figure in front of him. She had always dressed neatly, but to-day she had taken special pains with her toilet, and her dark blue yachting costume, faced with white braid, suited her lithe, slender figure admirably. As soon as they got away from the shelter of the land, and felt the full force of the breeze, their craft flew along at a pace which delighted them both. "Doesn't she go beautifully?" said Ella, and taking up a long pair of field-glasses, she swept the horizon in front of them. Then she began to chat vivaciously about general subjects. Ned had never seen her so excited. Presently she suggested refreshments, and, taking the helm, made Ned open a bottle of champagne, and regaled him upon cold fowl and ham, and strawberries and cream. He opened his eyes in surprise, but she placed her finger warningly on her lips, and he said nothing.

They had been running in a south easterly direction for about three hours, and the light was beginning to fail. Behind them, a little to the left, the Southsand's Head beacon showed the receding Goodwins; and in front, away to the right, the Gris Nez light flashed out like a great white fire with ever increasing distinctness. Several times Ned had hinted upon the advisability of returning, but had been immediately checked by his imperious mistress. So he ceased to care what was going to happen, and gave himself up to the delight of being alone with the woman he loved. But, presently, when he found the wind freshening so that he was obliged to take in a couple of reefs, and the sea running so high that he had to steer very carefully, he began to get rather anxious. But Ella would not listen to his remonstrances, and refused to let him alter their course. It was not until a sea broke over the stern and nearly swamped them that she seemed to realise the situation.

"I told you so," he said, as they bailed out the water.

"Well," she replied, "try and keep on five minutes longer, and if I can't find what I want then, we'll try another tack." She again took out her glasses and carefully scanned the horizon. After a few second's search she uttered an exclamation of delight, and pointed out the mast white and port red light of a steamer about a mile off. "Lend me a match, Ned, and bring to if you can," she said, opening one of the boat's lockers. With some difficulty she lit a blue light, and then a red one, waved them round her head and threw them into the air one after another. They had scarcely reached the water when a couple of answering lights flashed over the bows of the steamer. Then a searchlight was turned upon the boat, and the vessel came rapidly down upon them.

"Your second task is finished," said Ella, with a slight tremor in her voice. "When we have boarded that yacht there is one thing that I want you to do for me."

"Hearkening and obedience," he replied, muttering to himself: "Was there ever anything out of the Arabian Nights to beat this?"

The steamer soon drew alongside, and in a few minutes they were standing on her deck, while the boat was rapidly hoisted up to the davits.

A smartly-dressed officer received them. "Well, Captain Meriton, how are you?" said Ella. "You see I've come aboard at last."

"Yes, miss, I'm glad you have," he replied. "I was getting anxious. We're going to have some dirty weather, and the wind's blowing up a bit too fresh for that little craft to be comfortable."

"Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Singleton, Captain. I suppose his berth is ready?"

"Everything as you ordered, miss," replied the officer.

"That's all right then. Now, Ned, we may as well go and have some dinner. Captain Meriton, I hope you'll join us."

So saying she tripped down the companion into the saloon. It was artistically and neatly decorated, though there was none of the useless luxury often found on board the modern yacht. Comfort seemed to be its prevailing characteristic.

"One minute, Ned," and beckoning him to follow her, she led the way across the passage and opened the door of another room, which looked like a library. Motioning him to sit down, she stood up facing him.

"My last request, Ned, is that you will forgive me."

"Forgive you? What for?" he said.

She took up a copy of a New York journal which was lying upon one of the tables, and pointed to a paragraph among the items of fashionable intelligence. It read as follows:

"By the death of Mr. McKinton, his daughter becomes one of the richest heiresses in the States. We understand Miss McKinton is very unconventional and independent. She will shortly sail for Europe in her own yacht, etc., etc."

Ned looked up. "But I don't quite understand," he began.

"I have deceived you," said Ella. "My name is Ruth McKinton. Mrs. Dixon is only my foster mother. I have been accustomed to spend a week or two with them every year, for rest and quiet. When I met you I told them not to say anything about my real position, for I wanted a man who would love me for myself alone; and when one is rich—— Will you forgive me, Ned, or shall I tell Captain Meriton to steam back to Eastholme?"

Ned immediately replied in the most emphatic manner possible.

"Ned, Ned, don't," she pleaded. "You really must let me go. My maid is waiting for me, and Captain Meriton will be wondering where we have got to. Please tell him I won't be long."

* * * * *

"Well, I'm hanged," said Harold Mortimer, as he glanced through his paper at breakfast time. "What a blithering idiot!"

"What's the matter?" inquired his wife. "And who is the idiot?"

"I am," he replied. "You know that chap selling fish we met at Eastholme last summer—I should have spoken to him if you hadn't been with me. I told you that was Ned Singleton, the Bishop of St. A——'s son, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did, and a good many other people as well; but what about him?"

"Why, he's married the daughter of McKinton, one of the richest heiresses in America. He's a multi-millionaire. They've just arrived in London. And to think that I cut him!"

"Well, I must say I agree with you Harold. You *were* an idiot."

And the pleasure of finding that his wife did not disagree with him on at least one subject was all the satisfaction Mr. Harold Mortimer ever got out of the affair.

J. B. Beer.

What she Cried For.

Toto was crying very hard. "What is the matter?" asked one of her father's friends. "I have lost two pennies that mamma gave me." "That is not a difficult loss to repair," replied the friend; "here are two pennies." An instant later Toto was crying harder than ever. "What are you crying for now?" asked the gentleman. "I am crying," said the artful baby, "because if I had not lost two pennies I should now have four."

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THE STORY OF A PARTING.

AND OF AN UNEXPECTED REUNION.

"Well, dear, what do you think of it?" said Jack Trever joyfully, as with shining eyes he threw a letter on to the table. His pretty wife laid down her sewing, a flimsy bit of lace work, and crept close to his side.

"It will separate us, Jack," was all she said with quivering lip.

The flickering firelight seemed to cast a shadow on the lovely upturned face, and glint in and out of the waves of her chestnut hair.

"But, Alice, look what it will mean to us,"—to me he had almost said. "Here have I been slaving for a mere pittance, and now this piece of good luck comes at last; it is simply glorious!" Then casting a look at the sorrowful face at his side, he said, in a soothing tone, "It will only be for two years at most, love, and then I will send for you, and we will be as happy as the day is long. You will be patient, dear," he added, putting his arm round her, but still glancing at the letter on the table.

"Yes, Jack, I know it is for your good, dear, but it is so hard to bear;" and then scarce able to repress her tears, she crept from the room.

Left to himself, Jack paced restlessly to and fro.

"Poor Alice," he said, and then his thoughts flew away to the quaint little fishing village on the west coast of Ireland, where he had met her two years ago. Being attracted by her wondrous beauty, fell in love, and well—had married her, and been promptly disinherited for his pains. And such a struggle as it had been for him since then! He heaved a sigh at the thought. Now he would be able to enter his own sphere again, and mix with the people of the highest class—which was as it should be. Had he not been brought up in one of the best families in England? And Alice—she had sometimes worried and retarded him; her lack of education had vexed and annoyed his high-strung temperament. What would he do with her now since he had got this lucrative appointment in far away India? How would she pass herself among his well-bred friends?

"Ah, well, poor little Alice," he said aloud. "I will have plenty of money now, and maybe I can manage to send her to school on the Continent after awhile." But deep down in his inmost heart there throbbed a thought that sent the hot blood flaming to his forehead; and still it came, crush it as he might, persistent and recurring—"I shall be free, I shall be free for two long years, I shall be free!"

And away up in her own little room Alice was weeping as if her heart would break.

* * * * * * * *

He had gone—and oh, the desolation that had crept into one loving, lonely heart. For three months she had scarcely left the house, dark rings showed about the lustrous eyes; she wandered listlessly to and fro, looking at any little memento that might remind her of him, her husband, her darling; wondering why the sun shone and looked at hearts so sorrowful as hers. But one day, with his familiar rat-a-tat, the postman left a letter. It was from him, her idol; she could scarce see it for blinding tears, yet all at once the world had turned into a bright and joyous place. Then after a blissful half hour spent in deciphering it, she rushed for pen and ink to answer. But now the sweet face clouded.

"I cannot do it—I cannot do it properly," she murmured, a slight pout on her red lips. "They would laugh at him when they saw my letter," and hot tears gathered in the brown eyes and fell one by one like little jewels upon the unoffending paper.

She bent her head upon her hands in dejection; a sunbeam stole through the window and kissed her rippling hair, and as if it had lent an inspiration to her troubled thoughts, her face suddenly cleared, she sprang up, the glad light once more in her eyes.

"I'll do it!" she cried. "I was always good at lace work. Miss Crickmay shall teach me. I'll educate myself on the money Jack sends me, and keep myself by my lace. Lady Severn always bought it, and maybe in a year I can save enough to take me out to Jack, my Jack, and it will be such a surprise to him." And all the time with trembling fingers and fast beating heart she arranged her hat, preparatory to going to the select School for Young Ladies, over which Miss Crickmay presided.

Far away in India a young man was bending over his desk, just signing a flourishing "Jack" to a letter commencing "My dear wife."

"She must never come here," he said sadly. "It would break her heart to be slighted. What would Lady Winton say to her, I wonder? Not that she isn't far more beautiful," he ended up.

* * * * * * *

"You are marvellous, your progress is great, madam. My friend, Miss Crickmay, she is delighted!"

The girl addressed bowed gracefully, and closed her French book just as a lady entered the room.

"You are coming now, Alice, I suppose?"

"Yes, Miss Crickmay."

And side by side they left the room. On the pavement they stood for several minutes. People turned to look at this beauteous type of womanhood, who was talking so confidingly to the elderly lady.

"Yes, I know Lady Winton slightly, and I can give you a letter of introduction to her; but it is a mad venture, child. If I were you I would inform my husband of this intended journey; he might not approve." And so saying the elder lady hailed a hansom. "Come with me to lunch, dear," she said, "and we will talk it over." And very soon they were both lost in the maze of London's streets.

* * * * * *

In his private apartments in one of Calcutta's largest hotels, Jack Trever sat smoking, his eyes on the cheque-book he held in his hand; the little wreaths of smoke curled round and round, the clock ticked ominously in the silence; presently he closed the book and sprang to his feet.

"I cannot do it, it is a harder battle than I thought; but I promised her in two years, she will die of disappointment. Oh, for a bit of time!" he cried, as wringing his hands he walked up and down, the book lying forgotten on the floor.

"In a month Lady Winton's ball will take place. Alice could never face it. I will wait until then, and maybe they will send me farther inland—they would snub her so, poor child." And self was whispering—"What of me? How could I stand

it ?Oh, no, I'll have to wait, I could not do it," he added aloud.

Out on the blue Mediterranean a great steamer pulsed and panted onward, ever onward, bearing its freight of human lives, and in a cosy nook on the deck Alice Trever sat and thought of Jack. It would not be long now, and how surprised he would be.

* * * * *

Lady Winton's ball-room had never been surpassed; soft lights, glorious exotic plants, beautiful women. Jack felt the spell as he stood apart for a moment, listening to the sweet strains of the opening valse. Suddenly he turned pale and almost staggered, clutching a chair for support. A beautiful woman had just entered, and was being presented by Lady Winton to a few select friends. Gentlemen crowded round, anxious for introductions and dances, to all of whom she was gracious as a queen; but ever and anon an anxious look came into the glorious eyes, as if there was a someone or a something missing.

Jack soon regained his composure.

"So like," he said, "yet so unlike. Why, Alice is thousands of miles away; besides she never could act like that even if she were here," he added bitterly.

In the course of the evening Jack contrived to get within the charmed circle that surrounded this queen, and was content to linger on the fringe of her admirers and listen to the brilliant conversation. But her fascination was too much for him. Oh, if only he had never met Alice, this woman would have been his ideal—beautiful, educated, graceful, and yet so like his absent wife.

She had turned and looked at him, he stifled with a cruel hand a certain sweet wildness that had sprung up in his heart at that look. He moved a little nearer—he would, he must have a dance; he need not deny himself that. Only to hold her in his arms once, even though it would be short.

A sudden boldness seemed to take possession of him. He pushed Lieutenant Faversham slightly aside, bowed, and with his heart thumping against his side, inquired if she was engaged for the next dance. A colour soft as roses spread over cheek and neck, she handed him her card without speaking, and he had scarcely written his name when the music began.

Rising with a smile she laid her hand upon his arm. "I do not wish to dance, let us sit it out in the conservatory," she said softly.

He glanced at her quickly, a faint glimmering of the truth dawning upon him.

"Alice," he almost gasped, as they reached a quiet spot, "is it you!"

But two soft pleading eyes were all his answer, and then two lovely arms went round his neck, with, "Jack, my love, my darling, see what love can make me do."

Amy M. Knight.

"So you are going to marry? Have you anything laid up?" "Yes, I've got a rich uncle laid up with a paralytic stroke, an' I'm his only surviving relative."

WIFE (displaying her new bonnet): "This is the very latest fashion, John." Husband (sighing): "I wish it were, but I know it isn't. There'll be another one out next month."

SCHOOL-TEACHER (trying to explain what a brother-in-law is): "Now, look here, my boy, have you a sister?" Tommy: "Ah, sir, it's no good, she has three young men already. You wouldn't be in it."

SMALL BROTHER: "I should think sister would a good deal rather have you call to see her than Mr. Getthere." New Adorer (delighted): "Would you? Why?" Small Brother: "'Cause he always messes her hair so."

LITTLE MISS: "I'm going to have a birthday party next week." Mr. Nicefellow: "The members of your family always celebrate their birthdays, I believe?" Little Miss: "Yes, all but sister. She's got so careless, she's beginnin' to skip hers."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

November 4.—Those having their birthdays to-day will have an active year; some danger of law; not a good year for speculation.

Girls will find love affairs very quiet.

The day is not good for signing papers, buying or selling. Do not make new friends, nor ask favours here.

A child born to-day will be thoughtful, suspicious, and cautious. Will do best in the employ of others.

November 5.—A favourable birthday for business, health, and general concerns.

Young girls will receive attentions; if engaged they marry.

The day is good to make new friends, and travel. Deal with jewellers, surgeons, dentists, and those in authority.

A child born here will be generous, cheerful and active. Will rise in life and will be successful.

November 6.—The birthday indications for to-day are bad, bringing much worry and anxiety over the next twelve months.

Girls born near 3 or 9 p.m. experience disappointment in love.

The day is evil for most things; have a care against chill and mishap from 3 to 4 p.m.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate and fond of pleasure. Will be crafty and perhaps malicious.

November 7.—An expensive year over home affairs. Go quietly or business will suffer.

Young girls need some care with married men.

The day is one on which to remain quiet and defer all important undertakings.

A child born here will be extravagant, fond of change and travel.

November 8.—A mixed year may be expected by those whose birthdays occur to-day Some expense over home, and through sickness.

Love affairs cause girls anxiety; third parties interfere.

The day is good for buying and selling; evil for pleasure, visiting, marriage, and dealing with superiors.

A child born this day will be unfortunate in the employ of others. Fond of pleasure, change and society.

November 9.—A good birthday, and the year will be one of progress; make changes and sign agreements; deal with land and property.

Girls will find the opposite sex friendly.

A child born here will be active, clever, and skilful. If a male, would do well as a designer, draughtsman, or in a shipping office.

November 10.—A year of activity; have a care against law and accidents. Insure against fire, and see you are not robbed by servants. Some benefit through a death, or a friend.

Girls become engaged or marry, but need some caution with letters.

The day is good for pleasure and marriage, but some extra care should be taken near horses, and against mishap.

A child born to-day will be cheerful, active, witty and free. The temper will be hot when roused and the speech bitter and sarcastic.

Asturel.

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TOM'S FLIRTATION.

Things Are Not Always What They Seem.

"And so you positively refuse to give up this intimacy?"

"Really, you ask too much, Aunty. What else can I do in this stupid place? I am devoted to yachting, you know, and besides, Mr. Trevor is the only man here who has a motor car."

"But, my child, you are engaged to be married! What would Tom say if he should hear of it? And what would you do if he followed your example?"

"Oh, I wish he would! His devotion wearies me sometimes. He used to be quite a tease, but since our engagement he seems to have foresworn everything exciting."

Flossie tossed her pretty head until her blonde curls fell over her eyes from which gleamed a spirit of mischief.

The first speaker was Miss Treadway, the girl's aunt, a wealthy woman of forty years, who had adopted her after the death of her parents. Flossie's *fiancé*, a young doctor of good family and some means, was completing a medical course in Germany, and they were to be married as soon as he received his foreign diploma.

The girl loved him, but she was very young—only nineteen—and she was a wilful maid, having always had her own way. Her besetting sin was love of admiration, and she deemed it essential to her happiness to have a man in her toils. So, being for the time bereft of her lover, she had drifted into a serious flirtation with a rich bachelor who lived near the seaside resort where they were staying.

Mr. Trevor's summer home, a fine stone mansion overlooking the harbour, was the scene of many festivities. He had already given two dinners in Flossie's honour, at which functions Miss Treadway had served as an unwilling chaperon, for she realised that the brilliant company invited to meet them regarded her niece as the future Mrs. Trevor. Now we find her reproving her young relative, with indifferent success.

"Flossie," said Miss Treadway. "I think you ought to consider Mr. Trevor's feelings. It is not fair to him; he does not know about Tom. Perhaps you had better tell him?"

"And spoil all my fun? Why, aunty, what a fuss you are making about a trifle! I cannot mope here without men's society, Tom is in Germany, the sea divides us, and he is welcome to enjoy himself in like manner. However, there is no prospect of his doing anything so sensible. Why, I verily believe he spends all his leisure time writing to me. I get so many letters that I don't read half of them. And that reminds me, one came yesterday when I was getting ready to go out in the yacht. I haven't read it yet; really, I had forgotten it."

"Flossie, you are incorrigible!" exclaimed Miss Treadway with as much severity of tone as she was capable of. "I give you up, wash my hands of the whole affair. But if you lose Tom do not blame any one but yourself. I will leave you to your own thoughts, as I am due at a meeting at the Rectory this afternoon."

When she was alone Flossie curled her dainty self in a large easy chair and laughed softly as she recalled her aunt's words.

"Lose Tom," she repeated. "No danger of that, couldn't get rid of him even if I wanted to." Then she fell to musing, and a tender look came into her deep blue eyes. "Dear Tom," she murmured, "I do love him. I wouldn't give him up for twenty Mr. Trevors!" She went to her desk, found the letter, and having a fine sense of personal comfort, sank back into the soft depths of the chair and with a box of chocolates in one hand, the letter in the other, began to munch sweets and read.

At first her expression was slightly bored, then astonished, and finally she threw the sweets and the letter on the floor, flung herself face down on a couch and commenced weeping. The portion of Tom's letter which had produced such dire results ran as follows:

"I had such a strange and exciting adventure that I feel it my duty to tell you all about it. You know that my hotel is in one of the best streets here, and that from my windows I can see much of the beauty and fashion of Berlin. However, I never dreamt of such a vision of loveliness as the piece of femininity whose acquaintance I made yesterday."

At this Flossie's blue eyes opened wide, she sat up, loosed her hold on the chocolates, and read on:

"The object of my admiration sat in her carriage alone and unattended just below my window. Suddenly I heard the rush of a runaway horse from the opposite direction, and seeing her alarm, I hastened down the steps and assisted her to the pavement. She smiled sweetly and was about to speak when her attendant returned and she re-entered the carriage and was rapidly driven away; not forgetting to throw me a kiss just as she was lost to view.

"The world seemed a blank without her" (here Flossie's expression became indignant); "I found on inquiry that she was staying at my hotel, and so had grounds for hope of a speedy meeting. That night for the first time in years my dreams were not of you alone, the beautiful blonde appeared to me more than once, always with that charming smile!"

"Fancy!" exclaimed Flossie.

"To-day the plot has thickened, and however painful it may be for you to hear it, I feel it only honourable that you should know all particulars, and then judge for yourself if I am to blame. This morning I was seated near the front window reading. Keeping one eye on the street—you can easily imagine why—when there came a gentle tap at my door.

"Thinking it was the waiter, I shouted 'Come in!' The door opened, and, to my utter amazement, there stood the beautiful blonde all smiles and blushes. After I had recovered from the delicious shock, which thrilled me from head to foot, I invited her to a seat on the sofa, and then endeavoured to entertain this fairy guest to the best of my ability. You must not be shocked, dear, when I confess to you that we soon became great friends, and that she came of her own accord and sat on my lap——"

It was here that Flossie flung the obnoxious letter away

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from her and began to weep wildly, and she was so absorbed in her grief that Miss Treadway entered unobserved.

"Why, what is this?" exclaimed her aunt. She bent over the prostrate form and said: "Flossie, dear; tell aunty."

The girl only cried the more, but at last wailed, "That man; that wicked, false man!"

"Who do you mean?" asked the bewildered woman.

"Tom! See, the letter on the floor!"

Mrs. Treadway picked up the letter, put on her glasses and began to read; at first she looked puzzled, then amused, and finally she laughed outright.

Flossie raised her head and gazed at her reproachfully with tear-stained eyes which looked like wet violets, and said:

"Oh, aunty, how can you laugh? The false villain! To let a strange woman sit on his lap! And I loved him so!"

"Why don't you finish the letter?" asked her aunt, with a quizzical expression in her kindly eyes.

"Because I won't!" cried Flossie, springing to her feet. "Never mention that man to me again. Where are my hat and my jacket? I am going to ride with Mr. Trevor at five, and if he asks me to marry him I will say 'yes.'"

At this Miss Treadway only smiled.

"There, there! Sit down and listen to your old aunty. Nay, I insist. If I am not mistaken you left off just when she sat on his lap?"

"Yes!" cried Flossie. "How can you bear to speak of it?"

"Listen," interrupted Miss Treadway. Flossie, awed by the unaccustomed severity of tone, obeyed.

"She came down of her own accord and sat on my lap. Fortunately I had a box of sweets and I was offering her some when there came another tap at the door. Putting her hastily down, for I did not wish to be caught with a young lady in my arms, I opened the door and there stood a stout French nurse, with a high white cap and apron, who asked anxiously if "*la petite Mademoiselle Hélène*" was within. And, Flossie, she sternly reprimanded my charmer for entering a strange gentleman's apartments uninvited, and she led the beautiful blonde away in tears, who, by the way, was just three years old, and it was from a baby carriage that I assisted her the day before!"

By this time Flossie had ceased to weep, and, though much abashed, she could not refrain from joining in her aunt's laugh.

"Flossie," said Miss Treadway later on, "how do you like the idea of Tom's flirting? And I believe I heard a maiden say not long ago that she wished he would tease her as he used to do. How do you enjoy it?"

"Spare me!" cried Flossie. "You know I don't like it. Oh, I wish we could go away from here. Mr. Trevor's attentions are so marked, and the worst of it is I now realise that I am to blame."

"What do you say to a trip to Germany, for instance?" said Miss Treadway.

"The very thing!" cried Flossie, all smiles.

And the next week found them bound for the Fatherland.

L. K. Fulton.

"Does he write to you regularly since you became engaged?" "No; sometimes I only get one letter a day."

Mrs. Prim: "Do you think his love for you is unselfish, my dear child?" Daughter: "Oh, quite! The other evening he let me sit so long on his knee that he walked lame for ten minutes. Fancy that, ma!"

"What kind of a clock is that, Jawkins? It doesn't seem to be right." "Sh—sh! It's called the married man's delight, my boy. The hands stop at ten o'clock every evening, but the ticking goes on as loud as ever. See?"

Husband (the father of six daughters): "Come, Rosa, there is a gentleman in the drawing-room who wants to marry one of our daughters. He is a wine merchant." Wife: "A wine merchant? Thank goodness! Then he will be sure to select one of the older brands."

Your Editor Chats.

This week I am able to present to my readers the first article of the remarkable series by Lady Peggy Carstairs, about which so much has already been said. One or two inquiries have been made in regard to this and the preceding series with which it may be interesting to deal.

For example, two or three readers have wanted to know why in a story paper like *Short Stories* I should publish articles containing plain facts. In reply to this I would say that although the statements made in the series are perfectly true, they still come under the heading of stories, and are therefore suitable for a place in *Short Stories*. It does not necessarily follow that all stories are fiction; there are true stories as well as fiction stories, and both "The Confessions of Cynthia" and "How I Chaperoned Belinda" come under the former heading.

Again, a certain similarity in the method of writing the stories will be observed between the two series. This is not accidental. The style in which the first series was written was so much appreciated that I took particular care to arrange for Lady Peggy to write her series in the same bright, conversational style. This condition, I am sure, will be generally appreciated by my readers.

When you have read the first article would you mind sending me a postcard and telling me what you think of it? All I want is your genuine, candid opinion, whether it be favourable or otherwise.

On another page of this issue you will find an announcement regarding Miss Madge Morris, who is shortly to be married. Of course, we can scarcely expect Miss Morris to devote so much time to journalism after the happy event takes place, as she has other duties to attend to, but she has kindly consented to continue to conduct the "In Confidence" page for some time to come. This will be good news for those who have benefited by her advice in the past and for those who may have reason to consult her in the future. Miss Morris' services in connection with the "In Confidence" page have been invaluable to hundreds of readers, and I am sure that all of you will join with me in wishing her every happiness in her married life.

Since finishing her series of articles, Miss Cynthia Hamilton has been writing fiction in the shape of short stories. Some of those she has submitted to me have been quite good, and I hope to be able to publish them shortly.

Your Editor.

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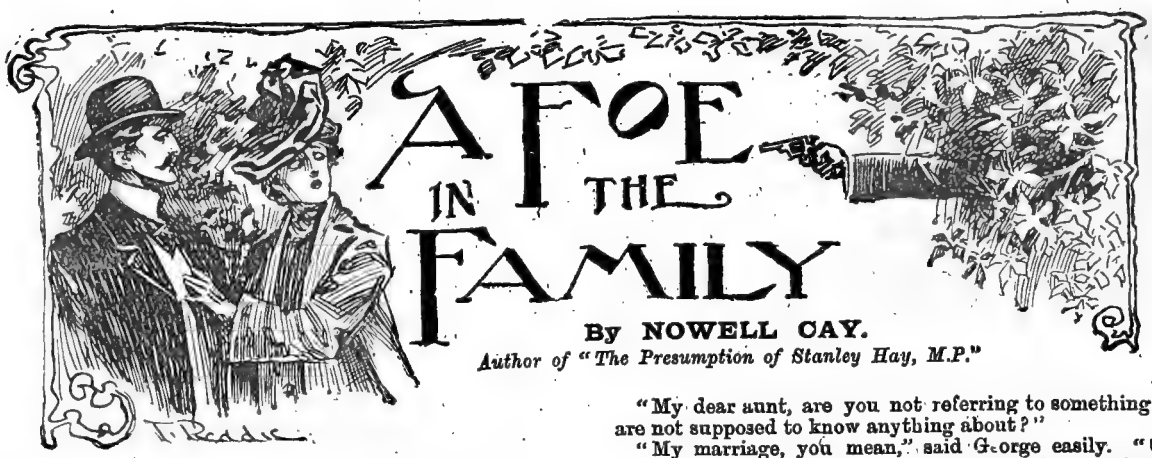

A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Plot to be Frustrated.

GEORGE ILDEN, Baron, of Ilden Castle, while staying with his uncle Jasper, at Pennybrook Hall, suddenly discovers that several suspicious events which have taken place during his stay at the Hall, point to the existence of a plot against his life. He has been shot at, poison has been placed in his pocket-flask, and other attempts, fortunately futile, have been made on his life. He confides in Cathie Hay, his cousin, and they agree that as many members of his own family would materially benefit by his death, the attempts must have their origin in that direction. They suspect Percival, Ilden's cousin. Ilden asks Cathie to marry him, as a means of circumventing his enemies' designs, but she has to refuse.

At about this time he meets Florence Courthorpe, the sister of an old college chum who was drowned while boating. She is very poor, and has taken a situation as governess at Witterby, a village not far from Pennybrook. In seeking to escape his foe, Ilden inadvertently settles down just opposite Florence's temporary home.

Late one night Florence sees a man attempt to enter Ilden's bedroom window with evident criminal designs. She leaves the house clad only in dressing-gown and warns Ilden of his danger. For this exploit her employer dismisses her.

She now has no home, so next day leaves Witterby to stay with some friends at Lallerton. Ilden accompanies her. Arrived at Lallerton, however, they discover that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left suddenly, and no trace of them can be found. Florence, of course, is greatly distressed.

Ilden, however, feeling that he is responsible for her position, and desiring to baulk his enemy, proposes to her, is accepted, and marries her secretly. An announcement in the papers informs his family of the wedding.

Shortly after their marriage Ilden receives a message urging him to return to Pennybrook, his uncle Rupert being dangerously ill. Leaving his wife at the apartments he has taken in London, Ilden leaves for Pennybrook. He is met at the Hall by Cathie, who informs him that his uncle is dead, and that he is again exposing his life to danger.

(*The above is a short synopsis of the opening chapters.*)

Ilden and Cathie Have a Chat

"You will of course come down to Mordenhale for the funeral?" said Percival, as Ilden was retiring.

His reception at the hall had been, as he expected, a cool one, except from Catherine, whose affectionate solicitude rendered him a little uncomfortable. He liked Catherine, but he was very relieved to think that she had not accepted his offer of marriage. He wondered that he had made it.

Mrs. Jasper had greeted him with the air of a person who had been personally injured.

"It is kind of you to give your relatives an opportunity of congratulating you," she said in her high-pitched voice, "although they are rather late, the fault is not ours."

Jane Barton interrupted her.

"My dear aunt, are you not referring to something we are not supposed to know anything about?"

"My marriage, you mean," said George easily. "Oh! no, it is not supposed to be a secret, Cousin Jane, after its publication in the *Times*. I ventured to take your congratulations, dear aunt, for granted."

Percival had made no reference to the fact of his cousin's marriage, and, indeed, had barely exchanged words with him, until now that he called him into the dining-room as he was passing to make his enquiry about the funeral. Ilden hesitated.

His uncle's death had been an unforseen calamity, complicating his plans. He had left Sydenham intending only to see him and return the next morning.

To postpone his return would be to break a tacit promise to his wife, or rather a promise which he had made to himself to satisfy certain twinges of conscience that he had felt for leaving her at all. And yet the social duty seemed one which he could not decently avoid now that he had actually shown himself among his relatives.

"Yes, I shall be present, of course," he said reluctantly. He was full of impatience to get back to his girl wife, and put an end to her anxiety, an anxiety which must be all the greater because they had agreed to run no risk of her discovery by the exchange of messages while he was away.

He could, of course, return to Sydenham in the morning, and still get back to Mordenhale for the funeral on the next day, but he resisted the temptation of the plan. He would not give his enemies an opportunity of following him and discovering the whereabouts of his hostage only to leave her again alone and unprotected.

"You will accompany us then, when we go down to-morrow?" said Percival, and it seemed to his cousin that the uncertainty as well as the eagerness in his tone were both suspicious. But he could not allow personal apprehension to make him neglect a plain social duty.

"No, I shall be at Mordenhale to see the last of poor Uncle," he said quietly. "But I do not suppose that I shall travel down with the others or be with you for more than the actual ceremony. You see, I left instantly when I got Uncle Rupert's letter, and I have a good many things to arrange."

"You mean that you will have to return to Lady Ilden. By the way, you have not told us where you are staying for your honeymoon, or how far the poor governor's letter brought you."

Ilden smiled curiously.

"No, I have not told anybody."

His cousin was not discouraged by the tone.

"You have an object in keeping it secret?"

"A very weighty one," said George, and closed the conversation by walking out of the room.

It was just as well for his cousin to know, if he were guilty, that he suspected him.

In the hall he met Catherine, her face full of anxiety.

"It made me horribly nervous to think of your being alone even for a moment with him," she said in a concerned

whisper. "If it was Percival who has been attemptin your life, he must be more eager than ever now that only one life—a failing one—besides yours, stands between him and his ambition."

"Well, I do not think that you need be nervous for a couple of days," said George with assurance. "Cousin Percy, whom, for all we know, we may be misjudging horribly, is not the man to risk his own skin rashly, and, if he is laying plans, I think that he will wait till we are at Mordenhale before he tries to carry them into execution. He knows his ground so well there."

"Then surely you will not go there," she cried.

"I must—for the funeral. I should think it cowardly to shirk a social duty because of my apprehension; but I shall make the risk as small as possible by going there only for the actual interment. After that I shall have done my duty to the family, and can look after myself—and my wife, again."

They had been climbing the stairs together, and reached the drawing-room now, to find it empty.

It was the first time that he had even alluded with her to his marriage, and Cathie's face took an immediate expression of reserve. It seemed as though she had taken it for granted that on this subject she could no longer expect her cousin's old frank confidence; but she could not neglect the opportunity he had given her by mentioning his wife—an opportunity for which she had been waiting.

"Oh! yes, your wife must be in danger too," she said, her voice constrained. "Is she aware of the fact?"

Ilden stared at her.

"Aware of it? Of course. You do not think that I should let any lady marry me in unconsciousness of her danger."

Cathie flushed a little at the tone.

"I never doubted that you would act fairly," she said, thinking that the advantages which the Rectory governess would receive from the marriage must more than compensate her for its dangers, whether she was aware of them or not.

"I thought I was acting fairly—but one never knows," he answered thoughtfully.

His tone unintentionally deceived her into the belief that he was ready for confidences about his wife.

"What, has Lady Ilden been complaining already?" she asked, seating herself. It had occurred to her that "the adventuress," once married, would soon kick against the life of seclusion which robbed her new position of its glories, and she flushed again when her cousin retorted warmly—

"Complaining! Good gracious, no. My wife is much too content, considering how little I am able to give her."

"I have no doubt," said Catherine, coldly, "that Lady Ilden calculated the advantages which she would receive from her marriage, and found them satisfactory."

The tone of prejudice was undeniable, and George was conscious of an unreasonable anger against his cousin. What right had she to imagine that Florence had married him for the sake of the advantages she would derive from the match? For a moment he felt quite indignant with her; then, as he realised with his usual sense of fairness how much justification he had given her for her belief, his anger and indignation were turned against himself. He realised for the first time that his own action and attitude had tended to prejudice Catherine especially, against his wife. He was anxious to make amends.

"My wife married me only because she loved me and wanted to take half my danger," he said stoutly, and hated the expression of scepticism on her face.

She had not expected her cousin, of all people in the world, to be so easily deceived by a cunning adventuress.

"A case of love at first sight," she said, almost with a sneer.

Ilden's eyes flashed dangerously, but his voice was deliberate enough as he answered:

"Practically. But Miss Courthorpe had already heard a great deal about me when we met, from her brother. He was a chum of mine at Rugby, and was drowned while boating at Oxford about four years ago."

Catherine still answered coldly—

"I am glad that you knew something about her before your marriage. It is a great risk to marry anybody of whom you know so little. I do hope that you will not regret it."

"Oh, no! I shall not regret it," he said smiling, although the tone had made him angry.

Cathie ignored the confidence of the assertion.

"You see, I cannot help feeling a certain amount of responsibility," she went on without a trace of self-consciousness. "If I had given you a different answer a fortnight ago, it would at least have saved you from this necessity. I did not know that you were determined to marry at all costs, although if I had known, it could scarcely have made any difference. But I have been a little troubled in my conscience after what has happened."

"Oh, I am sure that you took the right course," he said quickly. To hear her speak as though it were a matter beyond dispute that his happiness would have been safer in her hands than in those of the girl-wife he had left at Sydenham amused him, even while it tried his patience. His cousin had never seemed less attractive to him. He was almost afraid of being rude in his indignant desire to champion Florence, and tried to change the subject.

"I will wait for your verdict on my choice until you have met my wife. I wonder when it will be possible. At present I am not a bit nearer to solving the problem than I was when I saw you last. I suppose you have seen or heard nothing to help me since I left Pennybrook so precipitately."

The mention of his departure reminded her that she had something to tell.

"You remember the man in black whom we overtook on our way to the station?"

Her tone had become impressive, and George smiled.

"Yes, I have often thought with amusement of the excitement into which he threw us. He is a Mr. Despard, a friend or rather an acquaintance of my wife's. What is the matter?"

Cathie had uttered an exclamation of dismay. Her face was perceptibly pa'er.

"Your wife's," she repeated. "Oh, don't say that, George."

"And why not?"

"Because I am sure that he is in the plot against your life."

He stared at her tragically troubled face, incredulously, although he did not follow the connection in her mind which had taken the colour from her cheeks.

"This Despard in the plot. It is impossible," he said. "What makes you think it?"

"I only know that the arrival of Despard, as you call him, in Pennybrook frightened your cousin Percival away. You remember how hurriedly he left the night before you went. Well, Grant tells me that it was because he caught sight of that man skulking in one of the lanes."

And she told her story, as Grant had given it.

Ilden still looked sceptical as he listened.

"But this only shows that Percy has an enemy on his track as well as me," he said when she had finished.

"If it were so, what is more probable than that his enemy is yours, George. For one man to threaten both your lives is possible.

For two distinct men to threaten two different members of the family without any connection in their designs would be a coincidence too remarkable for credence. But my own view is that he and your cousin are in league. Of course, as you say, we may be misjudging Percival horribly, but we agreed at the outset to spare nobody in our sus. icions, did we not?"

She looked up as if anxious for his concurrence.

"Of course," he agreed. "We must say what we think. But if Percy brought the man here why should he show so much fear when he saw him?"

"Can't you understand it? To arrange a crime is one thing. To watch it being accomplished is another. Besides, prudence would make your cousin anxious to be out of the neighbourhood while the crime was actually committed. I cannot help thinking that the story points suspicion against your cousin Percival. Against the man in black I had my suspicion, as you know, immediately that we met him. And you say that he is a friend of the woman you have married."

Ilden did not like the tone.

"Lady Ilden's greatest friend is Mr. Despard's sister. She has known them both since her girlhood. What she has told me about the brother makes it impossible for me to suspect him—at any rate of being a paid assassin, and unless we imagine Percival paying him to pop me off, what possible object could he have in molesting me? Oh! no, it is out of the question. Mr. Despard is a gentleman, an artist, devoted to a country life of seclusion and his sister."

Cathie interrupted him.

"According to Lady Ilden's account?"

Her cousin turned upon her.

"What do you mean?"

Catherine burst into tears.

"Oh! George, dear, you know that we agreed to speak openly to each other, whoever it might be that we suspected. And I cannot help thinking that in trying to defeat the plot against you by marrying, you have only entangled yourself more in its designs. How long have you known the woman you have made your wife? What do you really know about her? Nothing except what she has told you herself. All that I know is that at the Rectory she gained for herself the reputation of a schemer and tried to inveigle young Haydon into a clandestine love-affair. And she confesses herself the friend of the one man whom we have most cause for suspecting to be the man who is attempting, or pretending to attempt, to take your life. You must let me speak out,"—as for the second time he tried to interrupt her broken and excited argument. "Of course, I know that she has made herself very charming, and pretended to love you. Women are such good actresses. I admit it, although I am a woman myself. And the wicked women make the best actresses of all, because they are troubled by no compunction. Do you think that any good woman could really know, love and trust you sufficiently in the little while that this one has done to confide her whole life to your care? It is impossible."

The young man's face had grown stern and set as he listened; but his voice, when she allowed him to break in at last upon her half-hysterical outburst, was almost painfully under control.

"And you suggest that Lady Ilden became my wife in order to give her friends fuller opportunities of taking my life?" he asked.

Catherine was not to be suppressed by the tone.

"I do not know whether the marriage was part of the plot, or the plot intended only to bring about the marriage," she said excitedly. "You know yourself that you would not have married her if it had not been for these supposed attempts on your life. And not one of them ever injured you. If they had really intended to kill you, do you think that the shot would have missed you every time?"

For a single moment Ilden did not answer. Mechanically and without his volition, his mind summoned up for review all the incidents which had led to his marriage to be considered in the light of his cousin's theory. Every step in his connection with Florence had been associated with the intrigue against his life. Their first meeting had come dramatically with the most determined attempt to shoot him. It was the poison in his flask which had driven him from the Hall and led to his travelling by the same train as his future wife.

Of the next attempt at Witterby he had no proof at all beyond her word. And it was this story with its alleged consequences at Minerva House which had led directly to Florence's complete dependence upon him. He remembered that on their way to Lallerton together, she had seemed to anticipate and almost prepare him for the fact of the Despards' departure.

Was it possible that Despard could really have travelled with her on the previous day without mentioning that he and his sister had left their home? His naturally fair and judicious mind busied itself for a moment in presenting proofs that Catherine's theory was a true one. How easy it would be for a prejudiced person to believe that the whole intrigue had been, not a plot against his life, but a cunning device to entrap him into matrimony.

He realised that Catherine would be absolutely convinced of the truth of her theory if he gave her all the additional facts which crowded to his mind, and even without which she had formed her suspicion. Percival's fear of Despard explained itself easily in the light of the theory. Percival had been at the Hall longer than he, and although he was not such a good catch as himself, he was certainly desirable prey for a penniless governess.

Perhaps his cousin had been subjected to exactly the same experience as himself, and had become nervous of lurking strangers, or perhaps of Despard particularly, before the intrigue was directed against higher game.

In the moment of silence he allowed himself to look at what had happened from his companion's point of view. Then the thought of his wife came back to dispel the theory and bring back reality. He was not troubled by a shade of uneasiness.

"You do not know my wife," he said severely, "it is the only excuse that I can make for you Catherine. Till you do, and see for yourself how absurd your suspicions are we had better not discuss the affair—or else we shall quarrel. I will go now and ask Percy what he knows of Despard. That scene in the lane—unless Grant has invented it—certainly calls for explanation."

She was too disturbed by his attitude even to resent the implied suspicion against Grant.

"But George, if your faith is misplaced," she pleaded laying her hand on his arm. "Men have been deceived before now, and it is terrible to think of you putting all your faith in an enemy. If I was sure that the intrigue was only to make you marry her, I should not be so anxious. The thing is done, and you would find out soon enough how you have been deceived. I should say nothing. But if it is really intended to take your life, and the marriage was meant to make it more easy—oh; it is awful to think of you trusting the woman who is only betraying you."

She was crying again, but Catherine's tears gave him no impulse of tenderness as another woman's had done. He was only conscious that crying made his cousin's nose red, and rendered her even plainer than usual. He felt very impatient with her, but his unfailing sense of fairness

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enabled him to remember that Catherine was thinking only of his welfare.

"It would be," he said with less severity," but there is not the least need for you to distress yourself in this way, Cathie. My wife is *not* betraying me. Even if she were, the abnormal young person whom, for some reason, you choose to imagine her—and I assure you that she is not—she would scarcely assist a plot that could only lessen her income and her dignity."

But Catherine's mind had already met the objection.

"If she is really your wife, George!" she interrupted. "You are not even sure that the marriage is not a deception."

Her obstinacy made it more than ever difficult for him to keep his temper. But he still made the effort.

"You may assure yourself that the marriage is as valid as it could be made," he said, smiling.

"But it would mean nothing if the woman were married already. For all you know she may be the wife of this man Despard, or even of Percival himself. Grant has just heard a report that he was married secretly this summer to some girl in the country."

Ilden was too angry to take any interest in it.

"Don't you think that you are going a little too far, Catherine," he said, frigidly. "You seem to forget that you are talking about my wife. I have let you say much more than I ought to have done; but that is only because this ends the matter. Lady Ilden's name must not cross your lips again until you can speak of her as you ought to speak before her husband."

Catherine was answering with spirit, as Grant strolled unconsciously through the open doorway.

"You talk as though it were a real, ordinary marriage. You cannot pretend that you care for her," were the words that caught his ear, before the sight of Catherine's tears made him retire with an apology.

George overtook him in the hall, but made no reference to the scene. He was on his way to the room where he had left Percival, determined to ask him point blank what he knew of Guy Despard.

Who is Mr. Guy Despard?

From the first moment when Ilden had begun to suspect the existence of a plot against his life, and after due consideration had come involuntarily to the conclusion that Percival was the most likely person to have originated it, he had been very anxious for a straightforward talk with his cousin. But so far he had found it impossible to make any tangible charge against him.

Here, however, was a field for cross-examination which was not ostensibly connected with the attempts at all. His wife was anxious to ascertain the whereabouts of her friends, the Despards. Percival had shown some acquaintance with the man. He had an excuse for questioning him closely, and if Catherine's theory that the two were in league against him were correct, he might hope to gain something from his admissions.

He entered the room where he had left his cousin feeling that their interview might be an important one for him, and was disappointed to find it in darkness. Evidently, Percival had quitted it, turning out the lamp as he went, and George was turning to go when his cousin's voice, sharp and startled, surprised him from the darkness.

"Who's there? Who is it?"

Ilden laughed as he struck a match. He had no inclination to be left in the dark with Percival.

"Nobody very terrible," he said easily, as he re-lighted the lamp. "Whom did you expect! A ghost?"

His cousin was standing by the window with his hand still on the curtain slightly drawn as if he had been looking out into the dark grounds, and his face suggested the question. He looked pallid and nervous.

"You startled me. I was just coming out," he said.

"Then I wish you would give me a moment first. There is something I wanted to ask you, Percy."

"Fire ahead, then. I was just going to turn in."

There was a cigarette between his lips, but it had ceased to burn, and he was relighting it over the lamp. As he spoke Ilden lounged against the mantelshelf.

"I want to know whether you can tell me anything about Mr. Guy Despard?"

Percival's cigarette dropped on the table. His face that had been pale before became even more ghastly, and for a moment he stared at the speaker, too startled to speak.

Then, picking up his fallen cigarette, he made an evident effort to recover his self-control.

"Mr. Guy Despard? Who may he be?" he asked with attempted indifference.

"I imagined that you knew. If you can tell me anything about the man, I wish you would let me know it. His sister is a great friend of my wife's, and she has lost count of her whereabouts and is anxious to find her. I understood that you knew Despard."

Percival cast at him a quick glance of suspicion.

"His sister is a friend of your wife's?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes, but the fact can scarcely interest you if you know nothing whatever about the Despards. Come, you met the brother here in Pennybrook a fortnight ago, or rather went out of your way to avoid meeting him."

Percival stared at him blankly.

"I don't know what you are talking about. I tell you I know nothing about the man."

"Or rather, to judge from your manner, that you know something which you do not care to tell me," said Ilden. "That is what I wanted to ascertain. I can form my own conjecture as to the nature of your acquaintance."

He was turning away as he spoke, satisfied that Catherine's theory was correct, when she made Despard an agent of his cousin's, but Percival stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Ilden. There is no need for us to quarrel over such a trumpery matter. On my honour I am not acquainted with Despard. I have never spoken to him in my life. All I know is that he stayed at the Ilden Arms a week or two ago, and seemed to be following me about. I imagined that he was a dun sent by some creditor or other of mine. Heaven knows I have plenty. So I thought it best to give him a wide berth. If he is a friend of Lady Ilden's, I suppose I was wrong. Has he said anything to you or Lady Ilden about me?"

His eyes watched Ilden's face keenly, as if anxious to read there a reliable answer to his question. There was no doubting that it was one he was eager to have answered.

"Come, I have told you all that I know," he said impatiently as Ilden hesitated, "why don't you treat me with equal candour?"

Ilden laughed.

"Candour, you call it. If you want to be candid, tell me where Despard is now."

"And what should you do then?"

"Write and ask him the address of his sister, for Lady Ilden's benefit."

Percival lighted himself another cigarette with hands that trembled visibly. He seemed to be deliberating.

"If I tell you where Despard is, will you in return tell me all that has passed between you."

"Certainly," said Ilden, "although there is nothing to tell. I have never exchanged words with the man."

"Any more than I have. But I happened to see him this evening. So I take it that he is at P——brook again.'

"At Pennybrook?"

The announcement gave George a curious sensation.

"Staying at the Ilden Arms again?" he asked.

Percival answered irritably.

"I know nothing about his movements. I saw him here. That is all. If you want to know any more you must ask the man himself."

"As I intend to do," said Ilden shortly, and walked out of the room.

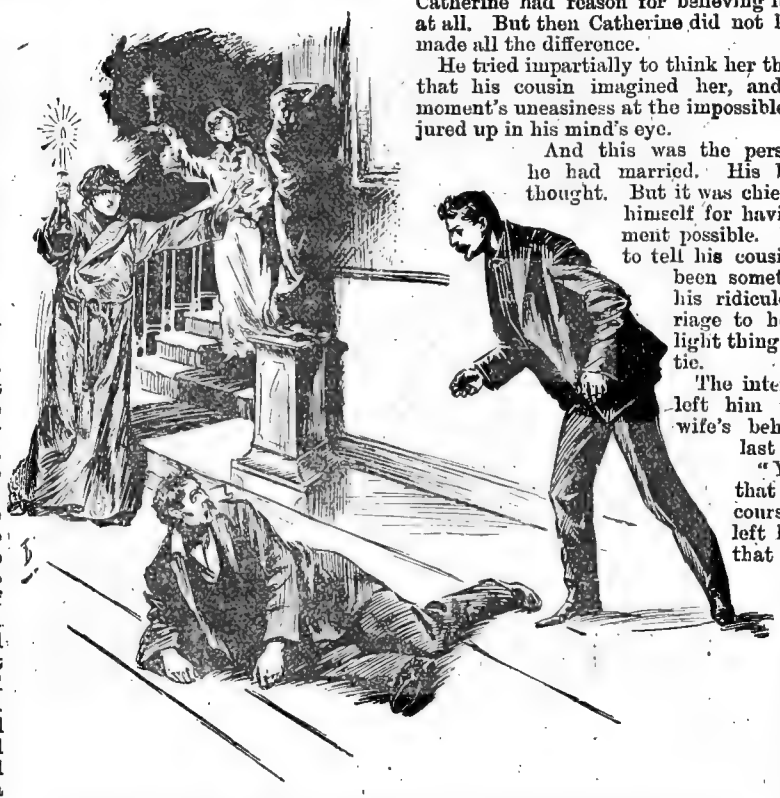
Percival's face was more ghastly than ever as he listened to his retreating steps. With an impatient gesture he threw away the cigarette that he had been trying in vain to smoke. Then he turned to the sideboard and helped himself to a glass of neat brandy.

The colour came back to his face when it was gulped down, and he gave a little laugh.

"Go, my Lord Ilden, by all means," he said aloud. "You will find Despard quite as eager to meet you as you are to meet him. If he is watching the house to any purpose, I think he will save you the trouble of a walk."

Another Attempt on Ilden's Life.

As Ilden left his cousin, he saw that Catherine had once more been waiting outside the room, nervous of the two being alone together. But this time she did not stop to speak to him. She was slipping into the library as if anxious to avoid his notice, and George was not sorry to be spared another *tête-à-tête*. If Catherine should hear what had passed, she would certainly see in it a confirmation of her suspicion against Florence.



Ilden half expected it, and yet was conscious of a shock to find he had been grappling with his cousin Percival.

It was proved at least that there was some connection between his wife's friend, this Guy Despard, and Percival, a connection which the latter had some reason for disowning.

Ilden had no doubt at all about it in his mind, and he put down the evident fear which his cousin had shown when Despard's name was mentioned to a nervous dread lest his ally should have betrayed him.

Yes, incredible as it appeared after the account which Florence had given him of her friend's brother, the quiet artist, content with a country life and indifferent to society, must for some reason have become Percival's tool. It was he, no doubt, who had fired the shot in the coppice and put poison in his pocket flask. He had really been pursuing him when he left Pennybrook, and although he had been thrown off the track at Rickerby Junction, he had probably returned when he discovered his mistake and found the clue again in time to menace his life at Witterby. It was Despard, of course, with his slouch hat, who had watched, revolver in hand, outside the Black Bull. And in going to Lallerton he had been approaching danger, a danger which sufficiently explained the warning he had received there. It had been given, if not by Despard's sister, by somebody who had enjoyed her confidence. For he no longer doubted it was Despard's sister who had written the intercepted letter to warn him of her brother's designs. Florence's identification of the handwriting on the envelope had not been a mistaken one.

It was a remarkable—indeed a marvellous—coincidence that he should discover his actual assailant to find him an acquaintance of his wife's whose disappearance with his sister from Lallerton had in a way necessitated their marriage.

Ilden did not disguise from himself the fact that Catherine had reason for believing it to be no coincidence at all. But then Catherine did not know his wife. That made all the difference.

He tried impartially to think her the creature of intrigue that his cousin imagined her, and smiled without a moment's uneasiness at the impossible person he had conjured up in his mind's eye.

And this was the person Catherine thought he had married. His blood boiled at the thought. But it was chiefly with anger against himself for having made her misjudgment possible. He had been a fool to tell his cousin anything. He had been something worse to make his ridiculous proposal of marriage to her, and show what a light thing he had thought the tie.

The interview with her had left him very jealous on his wife's behalf, and his cousin's last retort stung.

"You cannot pretend that you care for her. Of course you could not have left her like this believing that she was in danger if you did," she had said, and the words worried his conscience. If he did not care for his girl-wife as she believed that he did, it was unfair to her to let the fact be recognised.

Had he been cruel? Had he ignored her claims in considering those of his family? He was keenly conscious of the anxiety she must be feeling on his behalf, and he rebelled against the prudence which had made it seem impolitic for him to give his enemies the least chance of tracing her by sending her a letter or a telegram.

He had been putting on his coat with the intention of going at once to the inn and confronting Despard. Now that his actual assailant was presumably discovered, he was very anxious indeed for a talk with him. If the fellow's only motive was pecuniary gain—as it must be—it would be interesting to discover whether he could not be bribed to betray his employers. His heart had beat high at the thought that another hour might see the whole plot exploded and brought to nothing.

It was the thought of Florence which dissuaded him from the task he had set himself. His life was no longer his own to risk as he pleased on a foolhardy enterprise; and his previous acquaintance with Despard at Pennybrook in the dark had warned him that it would be fool-

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hardy, even while his zest for adventure inclined him to ignore the fact. Mr. Guy Despard was not likely to leave the village while he remained there, and, for Florence's sake, he must run no unnecessary risks. It was not enough that he had provided for her future in the way of money. He must remain at her side to champion her against the prejudice and unjust suspicion which his own action and attitude had done something to rouse against her.

Percival, listening intently for the opening of the hall-door, was disappointed to find that his cousin was going upstairs instead of out into the night, where, ten minutes earlier, he had seen the stealthy figure of Despard lurking in the grounds.

"Curse him, I wonder how much he knows," he said to himself, and helped himself to another glass of brandy.

Meanwhile Ilden was going to his room for the night. The Honourable Jasper and his wife had already retired, the former in a more helpless state than usual, on account of the efforts he had been making to drown the uneasiness caused by his brother's death, and George had no desire to see Cathie again.

But upstairs in his room, he became conscious that he was feeling restless and lonely. He seemed to have so much to tell Florence, and he could not even write to her until after the funeral. He was surprised to find how necessary her sympathy had become to him. The few days in which he must remain away from her seemed intolerably dull to him in prospect.

It had been foolish of him to come, and a strong impulse came over him to ignore his social obligations and return to Sydenham by the first train in the morning.

But in the morning he was to confront Despard. He solaced himself with the thought that the result of the meeting might justify him in leaving Florence and coming to Pennybrook at all.

He felt in need of justification, for the white, strained face which his girl-wife had worn at their parting haunted him more than ever.

How brave she had been. He lay down thinking of her with a pleasant sense of satisfaction at the thought that he possessed her, until a disturbing thought came to mar his complacency.

The fact that Florence knew the Despards would make it more likely for them to discover her whereabouts. His wife and he had indeed made some slight effort to trace Miss Despard. If Florence heard of her friend while he was away she would communicate with her naturally without a single scruple, and—if his suspicion was well-founded against Despard—betray herself to the enemy.

The impulse to return to Sydenham became greater than ever, and he satisfied himself only by deciding on a compromise with his resolve. In the morning he would go on to Ilden Castle, and send a telegram from the post-office there to Sydenham. Experience had shown that the dispatch of letters from the castle had not been attended by danger. Despard would no doubt follow him, but he was counting upon his ability to make the man change sides.

His mind was more at ease when he had decided it all, but it was some hours before he could lose his uneasiness in sleep.

And sleep only brought dreams more disturbing than his waking thoughts. His wife was in danger, and he could not get to her. Trains kept starting for London, but he was always on the wrong platform, and people kept him talking so that he could not cross. He could hear the bell jangling as a sign that the train was starting, and woke with a start to find that he was bathed in a profuse perspiration.

A strange feeling of dread was upon him, and it was some moments before he could remember where he was. Then as he became fully awake he realised that the bell which he had heard in his dream was still jangling loudly. Somebody was ringing the alarm bell fixed in the turret, which a provident builder had placed there to summon the neighbourhood in case the Hall caught fire, but which had never been used in Ilden's memory of the place.

His first idea was that the place was on fire now; his second that it had been set on fire by his enemies with a view to his own destruction.

The idea coming to him as he was half-way to the door suggested caution. He had to remember that he had an enemy inside the house as well as one outside. The alarm itself might simply be intended to make him leave his room, which he had made as inaccessible as locks and bolts could render it, and expose himself in a house full of confusion.

He turned back, therefore, to throw on his coat and make sure that his revolver was safe in the pocket. The feeling of nervous dread, physical, no doubt, with which he had wakened from his dream, still oppressed him and made him more than usually careful. For all he knew an enemy might be lurking in the dark corridor outside, only waiting for him to open his door, and he was anxious to give his opponent no warning. Fumbling for the bolts in the dark he drew them as noiselessly as possible, and turning the key with the same care, pushed the door open warily, to find all his precaution justified.

As the door opened there was a swift movement in the darkness of the corridor before him, an arm descending towards him with something in the hand that caught a gleam from the window behind him. He stepped back, slamming the door to before him, and felt the quiver of a knife struck into the woodwork that but for his wariness would no doubt have entered his heart.

His blood rose at the sound. Here was another attempt, plain and unmasked, on his life. This time he would not let his assailant escape him, and as the stab of the knife sounded on the wood he flung open the door again and sprang upon the indistinct figure in the corridor.

At last he had a tangible foe to deal with, man to man, and a fierce exultation possessed him as he threw himself into the struggle.

The man had gone down before his onslaught, and he had his knee on the arm that, for all he knew, might still have the knife to wield while he gripped his enemy's throat with merciless fingers.

The man writhed under him without power to speak or free himself, and would in all probability have been actually strangled if the struggle had been permitted to continue without interruption. Ilden felt utterly merciless.

But already people and lights were coming on the scene. The clanging on the alarm bell which still continued was rousing the household and bringing everybody from their rooms.

Grant, who slept at the other end of the corridor, opened his door, carrying a candle, which cast its yellow light on a picturesque figure in an embroidered dressing-gown of sea-green, at the moment when Cathie in her nightdress ran down from the next floor.

Her first thought had been of danger to George, and she flew past the poet with terror in her eyes at the sight of the two indistinct figures on the ground. Grant advanced more slowly, shading his candle, and as its light fell on the suffused face of his half-strangled antagonist, Ilden's fingers relaxed, and he rose to his feet feeling strangely sick.

He had half expected it, and yet was conscious of a shock to find that he had been grappling with his cousin Percival.

(Percival's explanation of his outrageous attack upon his cousin will be given in next Tuesday's thrilling instalment.)

THE wife of a man who often finds it cheaper to move than pay rent, recently misplaced her thimble, and was considerably annoyed over her unsuccessful search for it. "Never mind, mamma," said her little daughter, reassuringly; "we'll find it when we move."

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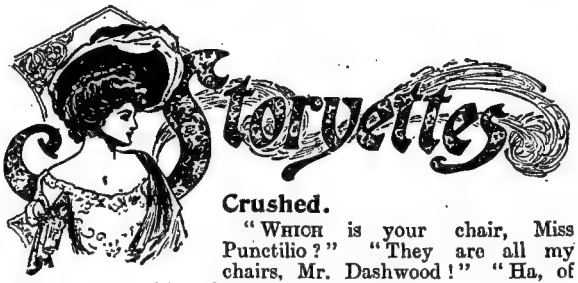

Crushed.

"Which is your chair, Miss Punctilio?" "They are all my chairs, Mr. Dashwood!" "Ha, of course; but which do you most affect?" "I don't affect one more than another; do you think I weigh a ton?"

Knew Her of Old.

Wife: "I've got a splendid dinner ready for you to-night. I was determined to please you." Husband (after complacently viewing the spread): "Ah, yes. What kind of a dress are you thinking of getting?"

He Got Her.

Ardent Suitor: "I lay my fortune at your feet." Fair Lady: "Fortune! I did not know you had money." Ardent Suitor: "I haven't much; but it takes a very little to cover those tiny feet." He got her.

Wrong Either Way.

He: "Only one, just a little one." She: "Oh, no! I have no wish to be added to the list of girls you have kissed." He: "I have never kissed a girl in my life." She: "Oh! Then I'm not going to let you serve your apprenticeship on me."

He had Noticed It.

"Women," she said, "are broad in their ideas and in their methods. They do not exhaust valuable energies in bringing small things to a fine point." "I have noticed it," he answered. "A woman invariably gets a man to sharpen her lead-pencil."

No Need after Marriage.

"Every single woman," said the eminent lady lecturer on "How to Find Happiness," "should study her faults and failings." "But why not the married woman as well?" asked one of the audience. "There is no need for her to study her faults. Her husband will attend to that."

Tommy Couldn't Write Nicely.

Mistress: "I found in your room a letter of mine that had been taken out of my writing-case. What is the meaning of this?" Cook: "Oh, ma'am, I only wanted to copy it for my sweetheart." Mistress: "What can he want with it?" Cook: "Please, ma'am, he's in the Army, and he doesn't know how to write me a love-letter."

Didn't Want the Tailor to Have It.

"I've had a rip in my Sunday coat for a month, but it will be mended when I go home to-night," said Dumsquizzle. "How do you know?" asked Skimgullet. "I bet my wife five shillings I'd find it there. She'll sew it to win the money." "You could have got it sewed at the tailor's for that." "I know, but I wanted to keep the money in the family."

A Hint that was Taken.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones were starting for church. "Wait, dear," said the lady. "I've forgotten something; won't you go up and get my goats off the table?" "Your goats?" replied Jones; "what new-fangled thing's that?" "I'll show you," remarked the wife, and she sailed upstairs and down again with a pair of kid gloves on her hands. "Why I call those things kids," said the surprised husband. "Oh, do you?" snapped the wife. "Well, so did I once, but they are so old now I'm ashamed to call them anything but goats." Then they went on to church. The next day Jones' wife had a half-dozen pairs of new gloves.

Wo—man!

It is justly said of woman that she divides our sorrows and doubles our joys. Pity she quadruples our expenses.

She Would Dispose.

He: "I—I would propose to—to you if I knew what to say." She: "You wouldn't if you knew what I'd say."

Both Took Pains.

Young Wife: "I took great pains with that cucumber salad, John, and I hope you enjoyed it." Husband (anxiously): "I'm afraid, my dear, that I'm taking great pains with it, too."

His Share of the Work.

Jaggs: "It's a shame to make your wife work so hard. Why don't you help her?" Baggs: "Why, I do! I make the fire every morning." Jaggs: "But who carries the coal upstairs?" Baggs: "We use a gas stove!"

A Distant Prospect.

He: "How many bridesmaids are you going to have, dearest?" She: "None." He: "Why, I thought you'd set your heart on it." She: "I had; but, from present indications, the girls I want will all be married first."

She had Saved.

Wife: "John, dear, you know how I have been skimping and stinting myself to be able to get a sealskin jacket. Now I wish you would help me." John: "How much do you need?" Wife: "The jacket is £20, and I have it all but £19."

A Terrible Error.

Gifkins: "What's the matter, M'Curdie?" M'Curdie: "Matter enough! You know some time ago I assigned all my property to my wife, to—to keep it out of the hands of—of people I owe money to, you know?" Gifkins: "Yes." M'Curdie: "Well, she's taken the money and gone off—says she won't live with me because I swindled my creditors."

Why He Gave it Up.

Man (to acquaintance): "Hello, Grinsley, how are you getting on?" Grinsley: "So, so, only." Man: "Are you still running that woman's rights paper?" Grinsley: "No; I have given that up." Man: "Didn't pay, eh!" Grimsley: "Oh, yes; it paid very well." Man: "Why didn't you continue to run it?" Grinsley: "I got married."

A Silenced Girl.

"You need not deny it, I know that he kissed you while you were sitting on the steps last night." "Yes, mamma, eight or ten times, I fancy." "Eight or ten times! Why—I—you——" "Yes, mamma, dear, I told him the first time if he did it again I wouldn't speak to him, and after that I could not tell him to stop without breaking my word. And I knew you would not want your daughter to tell a fib."

He Preferred Riches Himself.

Jack: "I have a chance to marry a poor girl whom I love, or a rich woman whom I do not love. What would you advise?" George: "Love is the salt of life, my friend. Without it all else is naught. Love, pure love, makes poverty wealth, pain a joy, earth a heaven." Jack: "Enough. I will marry the poor girl whom I love." George: "Bravely spoken. By the way, would you—er—mind introducing me to the rich woman whom you do not love?"

Wasting Time.

They were dining off fowl in a restaurant. "You see," he explained, as he showed her the wishbone, "you take hold here, and I'll take hold here. Then we must both make a wish and pull." "But I don't know what to wish for," she protested. "Oh, you can think of something," he said. "No I can't," she replied; "I can't think of anything I want very much." "Well, I'll wish for you," he exclaimed. "Will you really?" she asked. "Yes." "Well, then, there's no use fooling with the old wishbone," she interrupted with a glad smile, "you can have me."

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THE AWAKENING;

or, the End and the Means.

MADGE DAWSON laid a restraining hand on her husband's arm, and they stopped behind a sheltering hedge through which they could see the speakers whose voices had fallen on their ears.

"That's the worst of coming by the train previous to that by which you are expected," whispered Tom Dawson. "You come unexpectedly on a scene not intended for you to witness." "Oh, well! It's nothing!" responded Madge. "I should have gone straight through upon them, but I wanted you to have a look at my friend Felice before you spoke to her. There she is, and the man, about four years older, is her affianced husband, Llewyn Graham. He is her cousin. What do you think of her?"

"I should say that she didn't care a fig for him, or she wouldn't show him a cross face like that!" pronounced Tom decisively. "Let us go forward; I don't like to be accused of eavesdropping."

But the intention was frustrated by the words uttered by Felice, which came to them just loudly enough to be perfectly audible. The conversation was wafted to them on the breeze, for the engaged couple were now talking in a high tone.

"I don't believe in these child engagements, Llewyn!" said the girl, petulantly. "Two children are destined by fond parents for each other, they grow up together always with that one idea, they become engaged—formally, I mean—at a specified time, and they marry at the appointed time! Then you write "Finis!" and the thing is done! That is how it has been with us so far, and there is no excitement about the thing at all; it's the same always. Now, when you don't know to whom you are going to be married, it's different. It must be, of course!"

"I am sorry that there is so little excitement in our courtship, Felice," said the young man gravely. He might have said it with a smile half a dozen months previously, but he had heard a similar remark several times since then. "What can I do to make it more exciting for you? I have taken you to balls——"

"Oh, no, that isn't at all what I mean! And I can't explain, if you don't understand!" cried the girl irritably. "But, of course, it's all right and just as it should be! It is the best thing from all points of view that we should marry, and if it is all so commonplace, it can't be helped. Still, I should like a little more romance!"

"Romance generally means sorrow!" retorted the young fellow.

"That would be a change!" remarked the girl flippantly.

The watchers noticed the look of mingled love and compassion on his face as he gazed at her for a moment before replying, but Felice was blind to it.

"If it is so very irksome," he said slowly, "perhaps the arrangement can be altered."

"Probably you want it altered! Do you?" she interposed with slight sarcasm. "It happens like that, I should say, in early engagements. You grow up with the idea, as I said before, and when it is too late you look round and find there are others in the world! Perhaps it is so with you, and you wish to make an alteration?"

She looked at him defiantly. He stood motionless for a few seconds.

"You will not make me quarrel with you, Felice," he said at length, "although you always appear to be trying to do so! Let us dismiss the subject! I must go now!"

"Silence gives consent—you did not answer the question!" mocked Felice.

She turned on her heel and ran towards the house, a ripple of laughter coming from the flying figure. Llewyn strode away in another direction, much to the relief of the Dawsons, who thought he was about to surprise them.

Madge Dawson had been a friend of Felice till the former had removed from the neighbourhood of the Grange to Manchester. She was three years older than Felice, and less fortunately circumstanced. Her engagement with Tom Dawson had been prolonged owing to the fact that he had not been successful in his efforts to gain a position such as he desired to offer to his wife, but finally Madge had broken down that barrier, and had thrown in her lot with his.

"A woman's influence, so the great men say, is valuable to a man, and a wife can often help her husband by encouraging him and in many ways. Two heads are better than one, Tom! Let us take the present position and try to improve it together. Why should we wait and wait?"

So they were married quietly, and Felice had extended them an invitation to The Grange on behalf of her father. In her eagerness to see her friend, Madge had insisted on taking an earlier train.

"It will be a surprise for her!" she laughed. "We can walk up from the station, and the dog-cart can fetch our trunks."

As a result, they had arrived in time to witness the foregoing incident.

"Your friend does not impress me, Madge!" declared Tom. "She wants a touch of sorrow to awaken her. She has everything in her favour—money, a good fellow for a future husband. She doesn't know the happiness that is within her reach. I wish that things had been as smooth for us, dear!"

"I cannot un lerstand the way she treats him," observed Madge sorrowfully. "He is a thoroughly good, patient fellow. She is good at heart, yet she is quarrelling with her happiness! Why?"

"She doesn't love him!" pronounced Tom.

"I believe she really does!" declared Madge energetically. "But she always kept him aloof. I know that he tried to kiss her and make love when they were engaged, but she was scarcely old enough to understand, and she laughed at him. Naturally, that put him off, and he thought she did not like his demonstrations of affection."

"She is pretty," mused Tom. "No, I incline to my belief that she doesn't care for him."

"I'm certain she does!" asserted Madge, although she hardly knew why she spoke so warmly, and the next instant there came a little misgiving into her heart.

Tom was watching her out of the corner of his eye, and an amused expression began to spread over his face, but was instantly checked.

"If she really loves him," he observed quietly, "she requires to be awakened to the fact. Do you think we could manage it while we are here?"

"How? What?" demanded Madge eagerly.

"We must show ourselves now, or we shall be caught," replied Tom, evading the question.

They walked forward to the house and were met at the door by Felice, who had seen them just in time to welcome them at the threshold. The two young ladies greeted each other affectionately. Tom was shyly introduced as "My husband!" and then Felice was all activity in her arrangements to make them feel at home.

Mr. Graham, the owner of The Grange, was suffering from an internal malady that might take him off at short notice, but might permit him to live many years. He was desirous that his brother's only son should marry his only child and daughter; otherwise the estate might pass into other hands.

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and he wished to see a Graham continue the line of owners of The Grange. There was no question of money, as there was enough on both sides to make one independent of the other.

Mr. James Graham left the young people very much to themselves, contenting himself with a quiet life in the midst of books. Llewyn was living at The Grange, managing the property.

Llewyn Graham took to Tom Dawson from the first, and the four young people promised themselves some very happy excursions and good times generally during the stay of the Dawsons.

"What did you mean by saying that we might awaken Felice during our stay here, Tom?" asked Madge on the second day.

"By our example, Madge," replied Tom, with just the least hesitation. "You seem to be very thick with her, so she might gather from you—well, you know!"

"Ye-es," said Madge, doubtfully. She was rather disappointed; she had scented a plot and wished to be in it, and now there was nothing at all mysterious in Tom's idea.

Felice Graham did not appear to learn much from the example of Mr. and Mrs. Dawson; there was no mistake about the affection existing between them, and quite unconsciously they showed it clearly, without intruding it on others, notwithstanding. She continued to treat Llewyn in the same off hand, discontented style, and nearly drove the poor fellow into saying something harsh.

"I don't understand why you ratified an engagement with me, when you have seen others whom you apparently adore so much," she said to him once, when they chanced to be alone, and the conversation had drifted round to his last visit to Portsmouth, he having mentioned one or two ladies whom he had seen. Unthinkingly, he had spoken of their charming and attractive manners. "I can't expect to be brilliant."

"I was not making any comparison, Felice," he said deprecatingly. "They are not to be compared with you; no comparison is possible!"

"Oh, I know I am not a match for those or any other of your acquaintances!" she remarked with exasperating assurance, purposely misinterpreting his words. "Hadn't you better consider before it is too late?

His face paled. She was trying him beyond endurance. He had an angry retort on his lips, his heart was rebelling against this petulance, but he checked it. Feeling that it was necessary to say something, yet unable to trust himself to say more than a word or two, Llewyn turned on his heel with—

"It may be worth considering!"

He made his way hastily to his own room, where he sat in moody reflection.

"It would be a sad blow to Uncle James, but I am beginning to think that it must come to it!" he muttered. "It may be all very well to keep the name of Graham at the Grange, but I don't wish to spoil her life. I am passionately fond of her, and it would be well to unite the two branches of the family at the old home, but that is only sentiment, after all! Uncle could make it a stipulation that her husband should take the name of Graham, or that, if she sold the place, I should have the first chance of acquiring it at a fair price—not that I think she would sell it! I'll think it over a little longer before I mention it, but I feel that it will have to come!"

It was the last day of the visit of her friend, and Felice was struck with the worried look on Madge's face.

"What is wrong, Madge?" she asked, half earnestly, half banteringly. "Are you not looking forward to having your husband all to yourself?"

"Well, no, it—— That is——"

"So it isn't all happiness to have him all to yourself!" cried Felice, picking her up quickly, and laughing at her own smartness. "Well, if it is like that with you two, how will it be with Llewyn and me in another six months? You have had a little romance and I haven't!"

"I'm worried, Felice," said Madge, with unusual earnestness. "It isn't about myself, but—— You brought him into the conversation, so I shall not hesitate to mention him. Llewyn, I mean. I'm worried about you, though, more than him! Tom told me this morning, you see!"

"I don't see, so please explain!" Felice felt a strange something at her heart; her cheek was a trifle paler and her breath came less freely.

"Well," said Madge in desperation, "he told me something about your cousin that worried me, for your sake. I don't know how Tom got hold of it, and I suppose I ought not to say anything about it, but I must. I wonder if you would be very sorry if—if you lost him and he married another whom he loved better?"

An impatient gesture from Felice had caused Madge to shorten her rigmarole, and say what she meant in a blunt way. The girl looked strangely at Madge as if unable to comprehend; then she went as pale as death and both hands pressed against her heart. She seated herself in a chair near her friend, and steadied her voice to speak.

"Do you mean that Llewyn is in love with another girl?" she asked, with appalling calmness.

"Tom says he is positive about it!" asserted Madge. "I thought you ought to know. Tom said you wouldn't care a fig; he thought you would be rather pleased to be free, because you did not treat Mr. Graham as you would if you were fond of him. That's true enough, isn't it? You won't care much about losing him, that may be, but it isn't fair of him not to say so straight out."

"Don't say a word against Llewyn!" cried Felice almost fiercely. More calmly she continued—"Are you sure of this?"

"Tom is positive," repeated Madge, "and I must say that Mr. Graham has not seemed so attentive to you during the past three days as before. You must have noticed that yourself. But you don't care, do you, Felice?"

She stopped helplessly, for the girl before her was on the verge of swooning. Madge jumped up in alarm, but her movement had the effect of recalling Felice to her surroundings and she signed to Madge to resume her seat.

Both sat mute for fully two minutes, Madge watching with something akin to fear the varying expressions of her friend's face. At last —

"I must see Llewyn," said Madge, in a hollow voice. "He will tell me the truth."

"I thought you did not care for him, Felice, or I would have left the unpleasant task of telling you to somebody else to perform. I thought—you would be almost glad of your freedom, although annoyed at being——"

"Glad!" echoed Felice, in an expressionless voice. "Glad Madge, if he does not love me I shall die! I have never realised it before. I know now how wicked I have been to trifle with the love of a good man! It all comes to me like a horrid panorama! I must see him and learn the truth from his own lips. And if it is true——"

"Your father would like to see you, Miss Felice," said an old servant at this moment. She had knocked at the door, and, receiving no response, had opened it.

Felice went mechanically to the study, where she found her father in a state of considerable excitement.

"What is this that Llewyn has been telling me?" he asked excitedly. "I can't have this! You must go to him at once and set it right! I—Oh, dear, I can't have it! Go to him and see what you mean, the pair of you!"

"I'll see, father!" said Felice.

She kissed him and went out into the garden, towards a corner which was reserved for the private use of Mr. Graham, his daughter, and Llewyn. She was told that he was there.

"Has anything happened?" asked Llewyn, as his cousin approached him and he observed the extreme pallor of her countenance. "Is your father ill?"

"No, it is nothing!" she replied in the same hard voice as she had spoken the short sentence to her father.

She searched Llewyn's face for signs that would tell her what she expected to hear, but he was all anxiety. Yet it must be true; her father's remarks, coming immediately on Madge's revelation, were proof enough. Llewyn had told her father that he did not care for her, and wished to be released from the engagement.

"Don't trifle, Felice!" said Llewyn sternly. "When you

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come to me with a face like death, I know that there must be something very serious the matter. Tell me at once!"

He spoke sharply, and it caused her some surprise; he was always so gentle.

"I have come to ask you a question, and I wish you to promise me, on your word as a gentleman, that you will give me the truth in answer. Will you?"

"Of course I will!" he replied, staring at her blankly.

"Whatever I ask?"

"Whatever you ask!"

"Llewyn, are you in love with another woman?"

He started in amazement, and answered with some show of bitterness.

"No, I am not! But it would not affect you if I were, would it?"

"Yes, Llewyn," she said clearly, decisively, drawing a long breath, "it would kill me!"

"Felice!" was all he could exclaim.

"Why did you tell my father that you were in love——"

"I said nothing of the kind!" denied Llewyn stoutly. "I could not say it, for it would not be true! I told him that, as you did not love me, it would be better to give up the old arrangement and allow you to marry where marriage would bring happiness with it."

"Then—you thought—that I did not love you, Llewyn?"

"Yes, Felice! You have so often complained that I was forced to believe it."

"It is wrong," said Felice steadily. She was penitent, and determined not to spare herself. "I do love you, but until to-day I never realised how much. I thought I had lost you, and I had an awakening!"

"My love!" cried Llewyn. He held out his arms, still hesitating, lest she should not respond, but she threw herself into them and he pressed her to his breast and kissed her again and again.

"But who told you that I was in love with another woman?" asked Llewyn, when they were wending there way back to the house, his arm round her waist.

She told him all that had passed between Madge and herself laughing guiltily when she repeated her friend's homely truths.

"I did treat you shame——" The rest was smothered by a kiss.

"Tom Dawson must have keen powers of reasoning, if he deduced any conclusion of that kind from what I said!" cried Llewyn sarcastically. "But first we will go and explain to your father, and then you can settle with your friend while I talk to Dawson."

"No, no!" cried Felice hastily. "It was a privileged communication! I will speak to Madge while you talk to father."

Madge was unfeignedly surprised and delighted with the news that Felice had to tell, and promised to rate her husband soundly.

"I wouldn't do that!" said Felice with a happy laugh. "Through his mistake I have found happiness, so I ought to thank him for being a little—too sharp, I mean! I will thank him the first time I see him!"

Madge went off to find Tom in order to rate him soundly. She began as soon as she saw him.

"You have made a nice mess of that about Llewyn and Felice and another woman, haven't you?" she asked with vexation in her voice.

"Then it isn't true?" asked Tom demurely.

"All wrong! But it did good, though, for it awoke her to a sense of her conduct and told her that she really loved him, and so it turned out that your silly mistake did a lot of good and made everybody happy. And Felice is going to thank you for being silly and——"

"It was an odd mistake, wasn't it?" queried Tom drily, so drily that Madge stared and then gasped.

"You made it up, Tom, just to bring about the awakening that she wanted! And you never let me into the secret! That's too bad!"

"I thought you wouldn't act the part properly if I told you!" said Tom contritely. "I won't do it again!"

George Day.

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

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To each of the ten competitors whose sentences the Editor considers the best, will be awarded a handsome Gramophone.

All attempts must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday, November 11th.

RESULT OF THE "CUT-PICTURE" COMPETITION.

A SPLENDID Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following competitors, whose attempts in the above competition were the neatest of those which were found to be correct:

D. Pope, 5 Vernon Place, Birkenhead; J. Duxbury, The Central Newsagency, 32 George Street, St. Helens; F. Holt, 29 Rake Street, Bury; H. A. Joyce, 80 Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent; P. Smith, 4 Challoner Terrace, East, South Shields; Miss A. Mackenzie, 46 Teulon Street, Walton, Liverpool; Miss Olive Oliver, 21 Lee Road, Harpurhey, Manchester; Miss M. Bredall, 3 Birdhurst Road, South Croydon; Sergt. Jas. McKenzie, 77 St. Vincent Street, Glasgow; Chas. Sobey, 2 North Road, Queenboro; J. Bullers, 100 St. Asaph Road, Brockley, S.E.; B. Beales, 19 Birchin Lane, E.C.; E. Hardy, 46 Mersey Street, Hull; C. Pollard, 35 Heygate Avenue, Southend-on-Sea; W. Anderson, 66, Brunswick Street, Edinburgh; R. W. Vanderben, 47 Henry Nelson Street, South Shields; Miss Scott, Hope Villa, 17 Cann Hall Road, Leytonstone, N.E.; Miss J. Fisher, 125, Mornington Road, Leytonstone; G. W. Weller, Kingston Lodge, Prestonville Terrace, Brighton; J. Barnes, 105 Ruckholt Road, Leyton, E.; B. Nash, 2 Buxton Road, Brighton; W. Vernon, 3 Hull Street, Crumpsall, Manchester; Mrs. Wathen, Draycott, Cheddar; H. Howe, "Rossmoor," Grosvenor Road, Ilford; W. Murray, 11 Church Road, Cadoxton, Barry.

BELOW will be found the key of the numbers of the squares in their correct order.

PICTURE No. 1.

44	39	51	30	8	2	23	43	4
11	49	15	21	28	25	48	33	46
1	52	27	13	37	17	5	26	20
53	19	9	14	41	35	3	16	6
45	54	40	24	18	32	10	34	29
42	36	12	50	47	31	22	7	38

PICTURE No. 2.

11	48	54	30	49	34	10	7	8
22	28	1	52	9	31	29	17	46
36	35	33	27	19	20	12	4	18
26	53	51	37	16	21	13	25	38
32	47	45	6	41	39	3	5	14
23	50	40	43	2	44	42	15	24

PICTURE No. 3.

51	24	14	50	13	42	23	22	12
10	43	39	9	18	35	38	53	48
28	44	41	27	5	30	16	40	3
31	38	54	26	19	17	20	4	46
32	45	21	47	2	11	6	25	29
34	1	52	33	49	37	15	7	36

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A Mixed Affair.

I Marry Your Sweetheart, You Marry Mine.

"How are you, Jack?" cried Fred Wilmot as he warmly shook hands with his chum Jack Blyth. "I was just coming to your place, old man, and I am so glad I met you."

"What's up?" asked the other; "anything fresh?"

"Nothing beyond this," said Fred, "that I am in a little bit of a fix, and I want you to do me a turn and help me out of it."

"Of course I will," replied Jack; "say the word and I'm your man."

"Well, it's like this. I promised to take Miss Rivers to the theatre to-night and unfortunately I can't. Mother got a wire that Miss Steel will arrive at King's Cross at eight o'clock and of course, I am to go with the *mater* and meet her, I being the only man of the family."

"Isn't Miss Steel a cousin of yours?" asked Fred.

"Well, she is a kind of half cousin on my mother's side. Now it is rather sneaking on my part to palm the job on to you, but there is no time to warn Miss Rivers, and if she keeps the appointment and I am not there, you know there will be a beastly rumpus."

"Well?"

"Well? well? can't you say well again? don't you see what I am driving at?"

"No, not exactly."

"Would you go and meet her in my place?" blurted out Fred. "I know it is awkward for you, but——"

"You want to go by proxy?" said the other laughing; "all right, old man, I've no engagement on, and will obey your commands. Give me particulars as to where we meet, when we have to be home, how many times we have to laugh, and——"

"Oh, hang it, look here, you don't mind the job, do you, Jack?"

"Not at all, I'll be there."

After getting particulars the two friends parted, the one to see his cousin and the other to see his friend's best and sweetest girl. It was a foregone conclusion that Jack would be best man at the marriage, so there was nothing out of place in acting as substitute in a case of emergency like this. The only point was that Miss Rivers might feel the position, yet if she exercised the common sense with which she was supposed to be so richly endowed, there was no cause for friction.

Arriving at the place indicated by Fred, Jack waited for a cool quarter of an hour, then he saw Miss Rivers approach. She started when she saw who it was waiting for her, and inquired anxiously after Fred.

"Oh, Mr. Blyth, you gave me such a fright," she said; "something must have happened to Fred. Where is he? and why are you here?"

"I will explain matters in less than no time if you will allow me, Miss Rivers," replied Jack laughing. "Fred had to attend to a very important piece of business, and was called suddenly away, so he asked me to meet you as he did not want to disappoint you?"

"It is very considerate of him," and she tossed her pretty head to convey its ironical meaning, "but he might at least have found time to wire me, and not have me coming here for nothing."

"Thanks awfully," replied Jack with a grin. "You know what the poet says——"

"Never mind the poets, Mr. Blyth, you can tell Fred from me that I am very disappointed in not seeing the play."

"All right, Miss Rivers," he replied; "I'll do so with pleasure—that is—I mean I'll let him know that you were so much upset by meeting me, that you declined to go to the theatre," and he heaved such a sigh, that it blew out his cigarette.

"Oh, did Fred ask you to escort me?" she said with a pleased look.

"He appointed me to the dignity of ambassador, and representative of——"

"Now don't say such silly things," she interrupted with a merry pout, "and if we are going to stand here all night, we had better be going, as the Irishman said."

"Then you confess you haven't come for nothing after all."

"Come on, you silly goose," she replied laughing; "if you don't behave yourself better I won't go at all."

For answer Jack Blyth wheeled round and hailed a hansom and they were soon bowling along, and chatting on all the commonplace topics of the day.

Suddenly Miss Rivers said, "You have not told me what the business was that prevented Jack from coming?"

"He will likely tell you himself," was the reply; "you see, probably he did not think it important enough to make a special mention of it."

"But you know?"

"Yes, of course I do, but why so inquisitive?"

"I'm not inquisitive; I only want to know all about it."

"That's a good argument for a woman," said Jack laughing; "would it do you good, and be conducive to your happiness if I told you?"

"Yes; I am dying to know."

"But don't die just yet, or you won't see the play."

"There's no chance of getting anything sensible out of you," she said with an attempt to look angry; "will you tell me where he has gone?"

"To the railway station," he replied.

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"Oh, don't be so provoking or I will get out," she said, stamping her foot on the cab floor. "What did he go to the station for?"

"To meet a train." And he smiled a smile.

There was silence profound as the cab drew up at the theatre door, and not a word was exchanged as they took their seats in the circle.

As the piece proceeded, Jack stared hard at the stage, and when the curtain dropped on the first act, he carefully perused the hideous advertisements displayed to remind the people that they were not allowed to escape the worries of the outside world, and must be reminded even immediately after the hero has died at his post that "Silas Konkus toffee is the best."

The awkward silence could not last for ever, so Miss Rivers condescended to remark, "Aren't the dresses lovely?"

"Where?"

"On the stage, of course."

"I don't see any," he replied, with a provoking smile. "I was admiring the way that man is driving that pantechnicon

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and four horses. Now don't you think it a shame," he said sadly, "that after listening to the histrionic gifts of clever actors, that you are required to be reminded by that man sitting on his box, that he will remove your furniture by land or sea, at contract prices."

"Really, Mr. Blyth, you are getting too awful, I wish I had not come. I——"

"I am so sorry, Miss Rivers, if I have offended you," he replied ruefully; "I'll say no more about the pantechnicon man, if you don't like him. Perhaps you would prefer that cheerful undertaker's advertisement up in the right hand corner, he——"

"Are you going to behave yourself, or shall I leave you?" asked Miss Rivers with as severe a frown as she could muster. "You have spoilt my night's enjoyment, I will never come with you again."

"Have some chocolates, Miss Rivers?" he asked, completely ignoring the young lady's last remark. "I can recommend them. The last young lady I had with me said they were delightful."

"Oh!"

"Yes; will you have some?"

"Certainly not," was the reply, with a great amount of dignity, "you can get them for her the next time you bring her here."

"Oh, but I take some home occasionally, you see, my sister is very fond of chocolates."

"Your sister?" with an inquiring glance.

"Yes, why not? most sisters like chocolates, don't they, Miss Rivers?" he asked, with a provoking smile. "I——"

But the band in the orchestra struck up and closed the debate.

The remainder of the evening passed pleasantly enough. Jack Blyth felt peculiarly happy, as he sat next to Miss Rivers. Why, he could not say, but he was enjoying himself thoroughly, and felt almost boisterous in his mirth.

Miss Rivers could not but admit to herself that Mr. Blyth with all his faults was very pleasant company, and on the return home from the theatre she for some time seemed in deep thought, then suddenly said:

"Has Fred gone to meet his cousin?"

"Which one?" asked Jack with pretended innocence.

"How many has he, Mr. Clever?" replied Miss Rivers laughing. "I only wanted to know, for instance, if it was Miss Steel he went to meet?"

"Do you know her?"

"I have heard of her from Fred. I know she was coming to London on a long visit, but the time had not been definitely fixed. Am I right in my guess?"

"I will explain to you in as few words as possible," replied Jack with a smile. "Fred Wilmot went to King's Cross to meet his cousin, Miss Steel, and——"

"Now do stop that nonsense," cried Miss Rivers, "and talk sensibly. I did expect that Fred would have come to meet us as we came out of the theatre, but I suppose his time has been fully occupied in attending to his cousin," and a slight tone of jealousy showed itself as she spoke. "Not that I care, of course, but if he prefers her company to mine he can please himself in the matter, I will never submit to——"

"Hello!" cried Jack laughing, "you say you don't care?"

"No, not a bit," she replied with emphasis.

"Then why worry?" inquired Jack in mock solemnity; "you will find when you see Fred he will be all right, and as the poet says——"

"Oh, bother the poets, here we are at my place. Won't you come in, Mr. Blyth?" she asked as the cab drove up.

"No, thanks," he replied, "it is much too late, but if I——"

"You can tell Fred when you see him that I am not pleased with him."

"It would be better for you to tell him yourself. Don't you think so, Miss Rivers? The question I am most anxious for you to answer is, have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Very much indeed, Mr. Blyth. I am very pleased to have had your company Now we will say good-night."

(*Continued on next page.*)

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"Good night," and Jack Blyth raised his hat and walked down the street with a light step.

Fred Wilmot duly arrived at King's Cross to meet his cousin. They had met before, when she was of short frocks, and he of the merry knickers and scarlet stockings. He had recollections of a pretty face and laughing eyes, but he was simply dumbfounded with surprise when he beheld one of the loveliest girls he had ever seen step on the platform when the train drew up. Fred's mother and sister were there to give her a warm welcome; and after the first greetings were over, Miss Steel turned to Fred and said, with a merry laugh:

"Why, Fred, you have grown to an awful size; and, I must confess, good-looking too! Don't you think so?"

"I can't say as to that," replied Fred pulling himself up to his full height, and stroking out to its full length what did duty for a moustache. "I don't know much about my looks, cousin Minnie, but you—well, I must compliment you on your dazzling——"

"Come, come!" said Fred's mother, with a smile; "don't begin to flatter each other so violently already, or you will quarrel soon. We will now see to getting home," and putting her arm into that of her niece, she left Fred to follow on with his sister, and a rather disappointed look on his face.

Fred had originally made up his mind to go to the theatre just to put in an appearance at the end to smooth matters over with Miss Rivers and thank his friend Jack; but the time at home passed so cheerily that he delayed and delayed till he found that he was too late to be of any service in that direction, so he told his conscience not to blame him under such extreme circumstances.

Miss Rivers was duly introduced to Fred's cousin, Minnie Steel, so also was Jack, and, strange to say, whenever a proposal was made to go anywhere they always formed a quartette, which arrangement seemed to give satisfaction all round. Of course Fred was in duty bound, so he told himself, to see that his cousin enjoyed herself, and was taken round to see the sights; and Miss Rivers seemed to have no particular objection to the arrangement, so everything went smoothly up to a certain time.

"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA" commences this week.

See First Page.

The four friends went into the country for a day's outing; and in the general course of things strolled about at their own sweet will; but Miss Rivers found herself completely in charge of Jack Blyth, while Fred Wilmot disappeared with his cousin, and a search for each other was vigorously proceeded with in a half-hearted manner, as though each party were afraid of succeeding in finding the other.

"I think it is beastly mean of Fred to go and leave us as he has done!" cried Miss Rivers, tossing her head. "I will never come out like this again!"

"But you see, Miss Rivers, this is an exceptional case."

"Oh! of course you men can always find some excuse for yourselves; but I call it simply horrible treatment to be left by myself in this manner!"

"Thanks!" replied Jack with a grin. "Your compliments are like rays of sunshine and balm to a fellow's feelings."

"No nonsense, Mr. Blyth, you must go and look for them."

"That's what we are doing now, aren't we? If you consider me nobody, Miss Rivers, would you kindly allow me to be your shadow?"

"I did not call you a nobody, Mr. Blyth," she replied, looking away from him. "You are trying to make yourself generally disagreeable or fishing for compliments."

"All right, Miss Rivers," he replied, laughing. "As your name applies, I will do some fishing. Anything to catch?"

"You should not be so funny when——"

"When you are angry. Come, Miss Rivers, confess you are angry; but why with me? What have I done to cause you to snub me as you do?"

"I don't snub you."

"Yes you do. If things are as they are, I am not to blame. I know perfectly well I have no right to be so often in your company"—she looked at him—"but it is only a matter of convenience for the time being."

"It is my turn to return thanks for your kind consideration, Mr. Blyth," she replied haughtily. "We had better return to the hotel and see if the others have arrived."

"Of course I am always putting my foot in it," said Jack. "I meant no offence, Miss Rivers."

"I don't care whether you did or not!" was the reply; "it is quite immaterial to me, I can assure you."

"Oh! in that case we had better do as you suggest and return at once. I hope you will not be offended if I propose that this should be our last meeting, as apparently my company always seems to annoy you?"

She would have answered him if she could, but it took her all her power to choke back the tears that were ready to burst out, so they walked amid a silence that was most painful; and Jack Blyth swore he would never more do this sort of thing. It had apparently brought misery and disappointment to Miss Rivers, which upset him very much. As, though he was supposed to be a half careless sort of fellow he was thoroughly genuine at heart, and he did like her very much. The journey home that evening was none of the most enjoyable. Miss Rivers complained of severe headache, and not one of the four seemed particularly sorry when the time arrived to say good night.

Two or three evenings after Fred Wilmot burst into Jack Blyth's rooms with the announcement that a grand excursion had been planned for the next day.

"I say, old chap, you will come, won't you?" cried Fred.

"I rather think not," was the reply. "I have had quite enough outing for the present, and will now take a rest."

"Oh, hang it all, man!" cried the other, "we cannot do without you."

"Is that the reason you ask me?" said the other, with a slight grin.

"What are you grinning at?" asked Fred laughingly. "Is there anything tickling your imagination?"

"There is—slightly."

"Oh! What is it?"

"*You* have no idea, I suppose?"

"Well no; I can't exactly say that I have."

"Not exactly," said the other. "I quite admit that; but give me half of your idea, and I will give you half of mine."

"Now, don't get up an argument, Jack," cried Fred. "The point is, will you come to-morrow?"

"No!"

"No? Why?"

"Simply because I say no."

"What's wrong, old man? Have I offended you?"

"Not in the least; but you must admit that if I do not wish to come and join you, I am entitled to my opinion?" and he smiled a thoughtful smile.

"Look here, Jack, what am I to do without you? The four of us were going to take a boat and——"

"You require me to pull?" with a laugh.

"But Miss Rivers is going with us."

"Oh!"

"Yes."

"Now look here, Fred—do you hold that out as an inducement?" and he looked his friend straight in the face, and calmly waited his reply.

"I—I—that is, I thought that you enjoyed her company?"

"Well?"

"Why do you look at me like that?" asked Fred. "Are you suspicious of anything?"

"Are you?"

"What is all this fencing about?" asked Fred with an innocent air. "There is something in your mind."

"And yours?"

"Will you come?" asked the other, evading the question.

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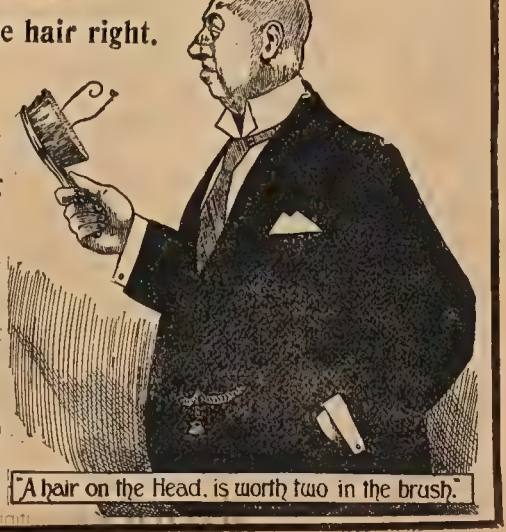

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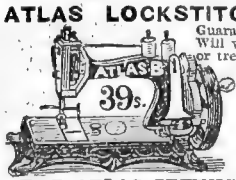

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"I might come on one condition, and that is, that I take Miss Steel for——"

"But," broke in the other eagerly, "you know it would be very awkward for me; you see I have had her company since she came, and she would think it strange to—to——"

"Just so."

"Now, don't interrupt me, Jack. I am only doing a duty, and I am much obliged, sincerely obliged to you for the way you have done. I admit it is hard lines for you, but I—that, I——"

"Are you finished?" asked Jack, with a knowing look. "Is this all you have got to say?"

"Well, you see, it's like this——" And a prolonged pause ensued.

"Like what?" asked Jack teasingly. "You have not explained what like it is, or any other like. But may I ask if you like your cousin?"

"Of course I do; it is only natural one should like ones relations, isn't it?"

"Of course not," drily; "there can be no particular objection to anything of that sort, or liking your fellow-creatures, for that matter. Why, I like Miss Steel very much myself," he said calmly.

"What!" and Fred jumped to his feet.

"Certainly," replied the other. "'Love thy neighbour as thyself.'"

"Come now, Jack, it is time you stopped this nonsense!" said Fred, which was followed by rather a watery laugh.

"Will you come to-morrow and assist me to entertain the ladies?"

"Now, look here, Fred, it is all very well for you to spin a yarn about my assistance, etc., etc., but do you think you are treating Miss Rivers well when you have neglected her to a great extent for some time past? Do you think it fair, I ask you?"

"But then, Jack, you were with her."

"That is begging the question altogether, Fred. You must not forget my dear fellow, that there is still a regiment called the Marines, to whom you had better apply to believe your story of disinterestedness in the matter. The fact is, you are deeply, madly in love with your cousin. Can you deny it?"

No answer.

"Why don't you own up now at once and be done with it?"

"Well, you know I can trust you, Jack. I am hopelessly gone, and what am I to do? I am happy, and yet I am miserable. I know I have not treated Miss Rivers as I ought to have done, but I am sure she will forgive me."

"With what object? Do you intend to be madly in love with Miss Steel and yet marry Miss Rivers? My advice to you is to go home and put a poultice on your head and get that nonsense drawn out. If you are in such a state make a clean breast of it to Miss Rivers."

"I am awfully sorry, Jack!"

"To tell you the truth, Fred, I am not!" and Jack calmly lit a cigarette.

"What do you mean?" asked Fred, as he saw a peculiarly joyful look on his friend's face. "Why do you say that?"

"Because it will enable me to come to your boating trip to-morrow, and I will ask Miss Rivers personally if she has any objection to my coming."

"Jack!"

"What?"

"Do you mean to say that——"

"Same as you, old man, and got it badly. I believe I will be able to relieve you of a terrible——"

"Come on, Jack! Shake hands, old man!" cried Fred. "I am glad it is over, and we understand each other."

The boating expedition duly came off, and when the party returned in the evening, judging from the happy faces and merry laughs, a most enjoyable day had been spent.

Jack Blyth declared he had been promoted to better than the best man at Miss Rivers' marriage; but Fred Wilmot and his cousin were too engrossed in their own happiness to see the joke

Alan MacGregor.

Miss Madge Morris' Marriage.

100 PIECES OF WEDDING-CAKE TO BE GIVEN AWAY.

READERS of *Short Stories* who were readers six months ago will remember the circumstances under which Miss Madge Morris came to conduct the "In Confidence" page. They will remember that she took up writing in order to make sufficient money to enable her to set up housekeeping. Her *fiancé* was not in a position to marry at the time, and had poor prospects of any substantial increase, so Miss Madge Morris decided to contribute her portion of the sum which would enable them to marry, by writing for the papers.

For the past six months she has conducted the feature known as "In Confidence" in this paper, and has contributed several articles to the other periodicals issued from the offices of *Short Stories*. The money which she has received for this work has been carefully saved up, and I am now pleased to be able to tell my readers that

Miss Madge Morris

WILL BE MARRIED ON

Tuesday, the 2nd of December.

She chose Tuesday because it is the day on which *Short Stories* comes before its readers, and she has to thank this little paper mainly for her success.

And now I have a rather startling offer to make. Miss Madge Morris, in the course of her duties, has frequently had dealings with readers who have seemed to her more like personal friends, and these readers number thousands. It is Miss Morris' wish that she should send a piece of her wedding-cake to all of these friends. But this, of course, is obviously impossible; it would require a cake as big as St. Paul's. We have, however, found a way out of the difficulty in the following manner:

We shall purchase a big wedding-cake for Miss Morris, and after the wedding festivities are over it will be cut up, put into boxes, and sent to certain readers of the paper.

Altogether a hundred delicious pieces of cake will be sent out.

Moreover, the beautiful centre ornament from the top of the cake will also be offered as a prize.

The conditions under which you will be entitled to receive a piece are as follows:

All you have to do is to sit down and write a short congratulatory letter to Miss Morris on the auspicious occasion of her marriage. The reader who sends what Miss Morris considers to be the best letter will receive the beautiful centre ornament from the top, and the senders of each of the next hundred best will receive a piece of the cake.

Send your attempt to Miss Madge Morris, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope "Wedding" in the top left-hand corner.

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By Madge Morris.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

A Lorn Natalian.

A SOUTH AFRICAN correspondent writes me to the same effect as did a Russian client recently. This gentleman, too, wants me to act as an intermediary between him and some English girl who would be inclined to accept an offer of marriage from an unknown suitor. He is in a good position, but has nobody to share it with him. To my friend, who calls himself "INTOMBI," I must answer as I answered the Russian gentleman. Do it through mutual friends. I am afraid I cannot undertake to be the agent in the matter, though my own personal sympathy is certainly with "INTOMBI." But surely there is not such a great absence of girls in Natal and the Cape that he, with a little enterprise, could not meet one likely to be as amenable to his attentions as any strange English girl with whom I might, with the best will in the world, be able to place him in communication?

❦❦❦

Four is Company, Three None.

"ADA" is engaged to Frank, who sees her very often. Now "ADA'S" brother has a friend staying in the house, who has been very attentive to "ADA," without, however, becoming too pressing. The other day he suggested her going to a theatre with him, but "ADA" replied that she usually went to such places with Frank, who would not like her to go with anyone else. To which the other man replied, "Oh, do get him to come, too. We will all go." Now, Frank does not want to go to the theatre with the girl and the other man, and yet "ADA" does not want to be discourteous to the latter. How can she arrange the matter amicably for all parties?

* * * *

Certainly it would not be nice for all three of you to go. Why not ask a girl friend to accompany you, and make up a party of four? To this there could be no possible objection on anybody's part, and if your lover objects, he would be acting very much after the manner of the dog in the manger.

❦❦❦

Another Photo Question.

I CERTAINLY thought, "M. H.," that I had dealt with your question regarding your friend and his photo, but possibly it was another of the same kind, and I associated it with yours. However, please accept my apology for the confusion. You made the acquaintance of a man on a sea trip, and he was very, very attentive to you. He hinted at love and marriage, but you, thinking it only a chance meeting, did not take him seriously. When you parted he asked you for your photo, which you complied with, and sent to him. He wrote back, promising to send his own as soon as he had it taken. Now two months have elapsed, and you have heard nothing from him. You cannot forget the man, and feel you care for him more than any other. Would it be wise for you to write to him, or do I advise you to wait till Christmas and then send him a memento?

That last is really quite a good idea. Why not wait till Christmas? Choose a card, or memento, which has a suggestion of a hint about those who are quick to promise and slow to perform. It would be a neat way of conveying the sentiment you feel. As he is the guilty party, of course if would look rather undignified for you to appear so anxious to secure his photo as to take the initiative in reminding him of it.

❦❦❦

A Probable Flirt.

"FRANKO" suffers from ingratitude and mothers. He is twenty years of age, and for the sake of a girl to whom he has been attached, left his native town and lived in her neighbourhood. Promising to be always true to him, she has lately been accepting attention from another man (please, "FRANKO," don't use the word "gent"). This man has the approval of the girl's mother. When the girl writes to "FRANKO" she says she likes this other man, that "she is going to enjoy herself while young," and so on. To which "FRANKO" has replied, "Do as you like." Do I think, if she really loved him, she would have acted in this way?

* * * *

The girl, "FRANKO," is a flirt. She has behaved in a most ungrateful manner, and is not worth your concerning yourself further. As to her mother's connivance, I do not for one moment think that if a girl were really devoted to a man her mother's opposition could force her to accept the advances of somebody else. The opposition of mothers usually has the result of making a girl more and more fond of her own lover. No, she appears to have grown tired of you, and evidently is looking out for novelty. Let her go her own way. You cannot force her back to you. Perhaps, though, she may in time repent, in which case you should receive her again in a forgiving spirit. Meanwhile allow her to go her own way, as you appear to be doing, and await consequences.

❦❦❦

An Anglo-Dutch Complication.

"PERPLEXED SUITOR" lives in Pretoria, where he is a book-keeper. He is twenty-three, and is very much in love with a girl of nineteen, who, however, has, since the beginning of the late war, resided in Holland, where her family went on leaving the Transvaal. In spite of the long period of absence, he still devotedly loves her, and she is aware of the fact. However, he fears she will marry in Europe. There is only a possibility of her coming back to the Cape in a few years' time.

* * * *

You are awkwardly placed. She is many years younger than yourself, and a girl's ideas often undergo great change between sixteen and nineteen. Tell her what your prospects are in Pretoria, whether in a year or so you will be in a position to offer her marriage and a comfortable home. On her answer should depend your course of action. It is useless for you to expect to hold under a bond any girl thousands of miles away from you, and living under entirely different circumstances, unless there is some such understanding between you.

* * * *

The other possible course is your being able at some future time to come back to Europe—even just for a visit—when you might make your proposal in person. Do you see the possibility of this within a year or two? If not, have you a friend who might be likely to see her on your behalf, and talk matters over with her? Meanwhile I advise you to think about making your way in the new colony, until such time as you are able to go to Europe and offer her marriage on your own account, or to establish yourself sufficiently well to ask her to come out to you, trying in the meanwhile to keep a hold on her affections by continuously writing to her and reminding her of your feelings.

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